

Student Perceptions of Discretion in Discipline:  
Seeking Resolution and Restoration in a Punitive Culture

Owen D. Webb, B. Ed.

Department of Graduate and Undergraduate  
Studies in Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

Faculty of Education, Brock University  
St. Catharines, Ontario

© Owen D. Webb 2009

**JAMES A GIBSON LIBRARY  
BROCK UNIVERSITY  
ST. CATHARINES ON**

## **Abstract**

This study examined high school student perceptions of discretion utilized by educators in high school disciplinary proceedings. Using a sample of 6 high school students who had experienced differing levels of formal discipline, the study investigated the discretionary factors that influence an educator's decision making. The study was a generic qualitative study where the primary source of data collection was open-ended interviews to ensure the integrity of the research as a study of student voices and perceptions. Journaling was also employed to record observations and to identify researcher assumptions. The data were analyzed employing aspects of a grounded theory approach. The findings were coded to reveal 5 areas high school students identified in relation to discipline and discretion: punitive discipline versus problem resolution, effective processes, educator discretion, student discretion, and the student-educator relationship. The final discussion highlights the need for a community vision for high school discipline in order to channel discretion and to uphold students' best interests. Restorative justice is proposed as a feasible vision for high school discipline, whereby participants' responses are measured against a restorative paradigm.

## **Acknowledgements**

Reaching the end of this study is the result of many individuals who have each encouraged me in their own way throughout the process.

I have been privileged to work with my advisor, Dr. Michael Manley-Casimir, and my committee members, Dr. Renee Kuchapski and Dr. Nancy Fenton. Each has encouraged me not only during this study but throughout my entire time as an M. Ed. student at Brock University. Their professionalism and encouragement have brought me to this point and will continue to motivate me as I seek to expand on my work.

I want to thank my wife, Cheryl, who never once doubted my ability to reach the end goal, though at times I thought it was impossible. You have made many sacrifices so I could fulfill one of my dreams. I hope that you can now do the same.

I want to thank my children, Ethan and Myla, who really only know their father as a Master's Student. I hope I can use the phrase "Daddy has to do some work" much less in the future! Thank you for your support.

Finally, I want to thank Andrea Neufeld, a friend and colleague, who drove many miles and spent countless hours completing projects and presentations with me. Your support cannot be quantified.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
List of Figures.....	vi
 CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM .....	 1
Background.....	5
Statement of Problem .....	6
Purpose of the Study .....	7
Rationale.....	7
Conceptual Framework.....	8
Scope and Limitations of the Study.....	10
Researcher Assumptions.....	12
Organization of Thesis.....	13
 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	 15
Student Voice .....	15
Discipline in High Schools .....	16
Discretion.....	17
Student Views of Discipline .....	19
The Student-Educator Relationships and Discipline .....	23
Empowering Students in the Disciplinary Process.....	25
Restorative Justice .....	26
 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS .....	 28
Rationale for Methodology and Methods.....	28
Foundation for Generic Qualitative Research .....	30
Site and Participant Selection .....	36
Data Collection .....	38
Data Analysis.....	41
Methodological Assumptions .....	42
Ethical Considerations.....	43
Summary.....	45
 CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	 47
Participants' Definition of Discipline—A Punitive Paradigm .....	47
Disciplinary Punishment Versus Problem Resolution.....	49
Effective Processes for Disciplinary Resolution .....	53
Educator Discretion .....	59
Student Discretion .....	72
Student-Educator Relationship .....	74

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS .....	79
Framing Discretion .....	79
Punitive Discipline .....	80
Student Perceptions of Discretion .....	85
A Just Process for Discipline.....	87
Restorative Justice as a Vision for Discipline .....	89
Student Discretion .....	102
Implications for Theory .....	104
Implications for Practice.....	106
It Was Worth It!.....	107
References .....	108
Appendix A: Notification of Ethics Clearance.....	116
Appendix B: Sample List of Interview Questions.....	117
Appendix C: Example of Initial Coding.....	118

## List of Figures

Figure		Page
1	Student's Respect for Punitive Discipline .....	82
2	Student's Fear of Punitive Discipline .....	84
3	Wachtel's Social Discipline Window .....	96
4	Continuum of Vision for Educators' Discretion.....	99

## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

*“Our students can teach us just as we can teach them”* – Susan Carson (2004)

Our lives are driven by choices. Choices range in importance from significant to trivial. Some require deep contemplation whereas others are nearly involuntary. In Robert Frost’s poem *The Road Not Taken*, Frost magnifies the potential implications of our decisions when he writes, “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and sorry I could not travel both.” To make a choice is to reject alternative options, and seldom can one go back on a decision. This study does not focus on the road taken in decisions but rather the factors that influence choosing a specific road.

Describing the roads, Frost explains, “And both that morning equally lay.” However, seldom do choices “equally lay.” There are *discretionary* factors that influence every decision. Feldman (1992) defines discretion as the “legitimate right to make choices based on one’s authoritative assessment of a situation” (p. 164). Hawkins (1992) describes decision making as a “collective enterprise,” recognizing the numerous factors that contribute to decisions. To bring integrity to decisions, one must look at decisions in a full sociological context, for focusing purely on a single aspect or a few aspects of a decision fails to uphold the integrity of the decision-making process (Jaeger, 2005; Manning, 1992). Nonetheless, the complexity of decision making makes it difficult to take into account every factor. Decisions are expressions of one’s values and beliefs (Manning). Decision making reflects the organizational culture in which decisions are embedded (Lipsky, 1980). In order to fully comprehend any decision, one would have to consider personal and cultural ideologies, history, recent events, organizational and

societal hierarchies, organizational assumptions, and the surrounding culture (Manning). This is a near impossible task.

Due to their complexities, an individual's choices can become routine and predictable, for decisions reflect the ever-developing values and beliefs of the decision maker. Baumgartner (1992) argues that discretion may actually create discrimination, for many aspects of decisions are predetermined by one's culture, beliefs, and assumptions. Because one is rooted in one's culture, the potential for discrimination exists.

Society works on the ideal that everybody should be treated equally. This is rarely the case, for discretion is ever present. Via discretion come decisions, both fitting and unfitting, depending on choices and circumstances. Nevertheless, discretion must not be viewed as a negative aspect of decision making. It is, simply put, a fundamental element of decision making. Discretion is instrumental in enabling society to function, for it allows individuals to work and to live, enabling and facilitating responses under ever-changing circumstances (Duner & Nordstrom, 2006). At the same time, discretion reveals the trends and taboos of our society. Individuals may be treated differently for countless reasons including skin color, hair style, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, the tone of their voice, or the car they drive. Since September 11, 2001 individuals of Middle Eastern heritage are increasingly viewed by many in North America as "potential threats." After the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, student searches have increased, and students wearing trench coats are watched with a guarded eye (Torres & Chen, 2006). Society endorses fairness and equality in decision making; however we are enabled and empowered, by the silent act of discretion, to make potentially discriminatory decisions.



Discretion is also endemic to our legal system and judicial processes. We trust our legal system and expect that the system serves us justly and fairly through acquitting and reforming citizens. Even so, our justice system is imperfect, leaving open the potential for the abuse of discretion. Judges, lawyers, jurors, and law enforcement officers daily make decisions influenced by internal and external discretionary pressures. Our judicial system rests on the proposition of *innocent until proven guilty*, although through discretion, and one's power to assess a situation, this can be spun into *guilty until proven innocent*. One's values can enable one to prejudge a situation. The outcome of a case can be influenced by the judge or the lawyers involved, for each individual brings unique backgrounds and perceptions to the proceedings, impacting the decision-making process. Juries are an attempt to bring openness and accountability to the process by enabling a group of individuals to make a decision. But discretion cannot be totally eliminated, as it is present in every choice and decision that must be made.

The judicial system is not always a fair system. One's education, one's financial situations, one's contributions to society, or who one knows can contribute to how "justice" is played out. Others can find ways to uphold justice through media, politicians, lawyers, or ombudspersons. There are also those who have little voice and are left to passively accept the decisions of those in authority. Through providing voice and giving individuals the opportunity to state their case, the imbalance of power and the negative use of discretion can be reduced. Ultimately, we seek to have justice upheld, though the concept of justice may differ from individual to individual.

Discretion is also ever present in the administration of discipline in Ontario high schools. High school students are frequently at the mercy of teachers and administrators

when it comes to discipline, conforming to decisions, with little voice regarding the disciplinary process or the final disciplinary decision. In September of 2001, the Conservative provincial government in Ontario implemented the *Ontario Safe Schools Act*, to take “serious steps towards taking a zero tolerance approach to discipline matters in schools” (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2005, p.1). Since then, the Safe Schools Act has been under fire. One study in the Toronto District School Board showed that “racial minority students, particularly Black students, are much more likely than White students to perceive discrimination with respect to teacher treatment, school suspension practices” (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2007, p.1). The current Liberal Ontario provincial government states that zero tolerance has no place in schools, for even “zero tolerance” policies are full of discretion. Steps were taken to change the Act in June 2007 to utilize *progressive discipline* rather than zero tolerance policies (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, 2007). One must ask however if the changes will result in upholding Ontario high school students’ best interests, protecting students and ensuring future educational opportunities rather than their being excluded from the system.

I have had the privilege of working as a youth worker, as a vice-principal, and presently as a teacher. Through the teenagers I have worked with, I have heard the stories of those who regularly experience the misuse of discretion in discipline. In high school discipline there are no greater stakeholders than students, for those about whom decisions are made bear the consequences of decisions. I am pulled to be an advocate for the rights and voices of the students with whom I work. The more I do this, the more it becomes clear that our high schools are a microcosm of our society. Seldom are all of the

factors considered when discipline is administered, though this is to be understood for Amstutz and Mullet (2005) claim that there are over 500 choices to be considered in every conflict situation. Nevertheless, despite an educator's best intentions, students are not always treated appropriately. Just as there are discretionary factors that contribute to how citizens are treated in a given situation, likewise students are not on a level playing field. Factors such as: who a student's parents are, what school activities a student is involved in, and a student's academic marks all contribute to how a student is treated. I hear frequent talk about *human rights*, *children's rights*, *women's rights*, and *animal rights*, but seldom (outside the educational literature) do I hear of the topic of *students' rights*. Most high school students have little voice when it comes to discipline. My desire is to give a voice to those who typically have no voice—high school students. Students seldom have the opportunity to respond to disciplinary decisions and almost never provide input into decisions. Student perspectives enrich our knowledge of high school disciplinary processes. Utilizing student perspectives brings accountability to disciplinary decisions. Through researching *student perceptions of discretion in discipline*, I intended to reveal how students believe discretion is upheld or abused in high school discipline and ultimately provide students with the opportunity to contribute to a more just disciplinary system in Ontario high schools. Students deserve an open disciplinary process that ensures their best interests are upheld.

### **Background**

Over the past 6 years I have had the opportunity to serve as a teacher and as an interim vice-principal at a privately funded high school in Ontario. Parents and guardians are very involved in the school and in the lives of their children, because the school is a

privately funded institution. As both a teacher and a vice-principal in this organization, I have observed many students experiencing frustration with the disciplinary process. Through my studies in EDUC 5P65, *Judgment in Administrative Decision Making*, at Brock University, I was provided the opportunity to analyze my own discretion as a vice-principal. Through this course I embarked on a journey to recognize my own misuse of discretion. It is now my desire to see justice upheld in high school disciplinary proceedings. At the same time, I am also aware that the standard disciplinary system used in Ontario high schools is so engrained into our educational culture that we as educators may perhaps fail to see or act upon the injustice that occurs regularly in discipline.

### **Statement of Problem**

Manley-Casimir (1974) said, "If the public schools are to teach students to understand and to feel justice, they must themselves be just institutions" (p. 361). Nevertheless, discretion enables educators to make disciplinary decisions that are not always in the best interests of students, resulting in ineffective discipline.

There is little research regarding students' views of discretion in discipline. Studies have shown that students feel they are not listened to and that disciplinarians fail to look at disciplinary scenarios as a whole when making decisions, rather resorting to standardized rote enforcement (Thorson, 1996; Wald & Kurlaender, 2003). Furthermore, studies have shown that students desire educators who care for them as people, for students say that caring educators are effective disciplinarians (Lincoln, 1995). Utilizing high school students' voices regarding disciplinary procedures enables those most affected by discipline (students) to provide alternative views regarding disciplinary

proceedings, thereby bringing light to discretionary factors employed in discipline.

Specifically, my research studied high school students' perceptions of the effectiveness of discipline in upholding the best interests of students through examining:

1. discretionary factors employed by educators in disciplinary proceedings,
2. how students' best interests are promoted and upheld through disciplinary procedures and processes, and
3. the impact of the *student-educator relationship* on discretion used by educators in disciplinary actions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to investigate educators' uses of discretion with respect to discipline as identified by high school students. This study aimed to give voice to high school students, shedding more light on discretionary disciplinary practices.

Utilizing students' perceptions and observations, this study explored the factors influencing discretionary decisions in discipline and how this impacts high school communities, specifically students. The study filled a void in educational literature regarding the discretionary practices employed by educators during discipline.

### **Rationale**

Though separate studies have been done on the topics of *seeking student voice*, *discretion*, and *discipline*, I found that the topic of *student perceptions of discretion in discipline* is not fully formed. In 1978, Manley-Casimir expressed the need for more studies in administrative discretion, but it remains an undeveloped topic. Creswell (2003) states that qualitative research can be undertaken when there is a lack of research or theory in regards to a specific problem. This research strengthened the current literature

available regarding discretion and discipline and how these topics are analyzed by high school students.

Student voices are seldom used in regards to high school discipline (Wald & Kurlaender, 2003). Lincoln (1995) believes that “listening to student voices can help us find our own voice” (p. 88). Through expanding student voice, educators expand their own voice, and the opportunity arises to change the current educational paradigm. Rarely in a research setting are students given the opportunity to express themselves. Smith states (2000) that in order to gain significant insight, one must involve students in a critical and qualitative analysis. To do otherwise is to make students just another statistic. Educational research and pedagogy are made rich by student voices. Geehan (cited in Innes, Moss, & Smigiel, 2001) suggests the following:

Each tale on its own is powerful, and tells us something new, or affirms something we already know, about life in schools. But it is the rich and complex braid made of a hundred individual stories and incidents that becomes a far more powerful tool for understanding school life. (p. 219)

This study employs student voice, bringing balance to academic research in education that more often than not employs educators as the primary source of data.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Three concepts formed the initial framework for this research: *discretion*, *effective discipline*, and *students' best interests*. Discretion or judgment is the essential element of decision making (Manley-Casimir, 1999). All decisions hinge on an individual's discretion. This is a central element of decisions in high school discipline cases, for generally power rests with educators in a school environment. Students are well aware of

the mostly private discretionary decision-making processes of educators (Manley-Casimir, 1977). These private discretionary decisions can inhibit just and effective disciplinary processes that uphold the best interests of high school students.

Belton (1996) proposes three sieves for filtering the effectiveness of disciplinary processes. The stages articulate that the goal of discipline must go beyond conformity and examine individual students. Belton's first stage is, *does discipline help or hinder learning?* Ultimately the goal of schools is to enable students as learners. If the system fails to do this, the motives or means must be questioned. Second Belton asks, *are students treated as adults?* As previously mentioned, students are perceived as adults in some areas of their lives but not others. To treat students as adults is to trust them, thereby involving them in the process. Wald and Kurlaender (2003) state that to fully understand the fairness of discipline, students must be asked for their views, but student perspectives in general are not well represented in the educational literature (Pomeroy, 1999; Smith, 2000). Finally, Belton asks, *is the teacher sensitive to the students' needs?* Ultimately, teachers need to ensure that the best interests of students are upheld.

The *best interests of the student* is defined using the model conceptualized by Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004), where *rights*, *responsibilities*, and *respect* are upheld. *Rights* include natural rights and those received under the Constitution. *Responsibility* is best described with an ancient quote by Aristotle (cited in Stefkovich and O'Brien), "persons who are capable of making decisions are moral agents and therefore responsible and worthy of being praised or blamed" (p. 203). Our school systems often fail to entrust students with decision making. The converse to Aristotle's thought may be that students are unwilling to accept praise or blame due to their inability to be involved in decision

making. Finally, *respect* involves a reciprocal act whereby a student treats others respectfully and at the same time lives expecting others to be respectful in the same way. If the discretionary decisions of educators are consistently unjust, then perhaps over years of education, students are moulded into responding reciprocally by being unjust themselves.

Through the development and progression of this research, the preceding three concepts converged under the philosophy of *restorative justice*. “Restorative justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible” (Zehr, 2002, p. 37). Inspired initially by the work of Zehr (2005), whereby restorative justice is described as a new focus for upholding justice, and later inspired by the work of Amstutz and Mullet (2005) and Wachtel (1999b) focusing on restorative justice in an educational setting, the findings of this study were analyzed from a restorative perspective.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

My experiences working with teenagers taught me the value of learning from individuals, specifically high school students. In order to gain true insight into the feelings and frustrations of high school students, I interviewed students themselves. In this study I sought the personal stories, analogies, and responses of six high school students. These students were from grades 10 and 11, both male and female, and had experienced various degrees of discipline ranging from none to suspension. The interviews took place over a 2 week period and were conducted at a private school in southern Ontario.



Carrying out qualitative research with groups or populations of which one is a member is referred to as *insider research* (Asselin, 2003). I interviewed as an insider researcher in my organization. In order to gain insight into the background and context of my organization and my study, I employed informal observation from both present and previous experiences. Furthermore, I maintained a journal to record my thoughts, insights, and questions that arose throughout the process. Nevertheless, I wanted to uphold this study as a study of *student perceptions* of discretion in discipline. This study is unique because it is a study of students' views. I wanted to ensure that student voice and reason was the primary data source employed and that my personal thoughts were shaped through student views.

Interviewing in my own organization brought about both advantages and limitations. The advantages of insider research lie not only in potential results but also in the research process. As an insider researcher, I was familiar with the culture I was studying. I had time to establish rapport with others in my organization. Because of my familiarity and rapport with the students, the natural setting was less likely to be upset. We were in a context of shared experience, potentially increasing the students' openness and willingness to share (Aguilar, 1981). For all of the advantages of insider research, there are also limitations. Some argue that insider research is inherently biased. I was close to the culture, the organization, the educators, and the students, and therefore I was not in a neutral position (Aguilar; Kanuha, 2000). Students could have viewed me as a saviour for their quandaries, making assumptions about the impact of the study (Asselin, 2003). I found myself in two different roles: as a researcher and as a teacher. I believed these roles were united rather than in opposition to each other, but not everyone shared

my view. I walked a delicate line, as I was personally involved, and I needed to distance myself from the participants and the process (Kanuha). Advocating for the participants while still accurately scrutinizing the results was a careful balancing act.

Even if one were to interview a significant percentage of a given school population, the experiences would be vastly different, for the factors contributing to discretionary decisions are complex. Because the study was done in one organization, the results are limited to the organization. Nevertheless, the interviews contributed data to a topic that for the most part is not developed. These stories have the potential for helping establish a foundation for future studies in this area.

### **Researcher Assumptions**

Though I currently teach in this organization, I served as the interim vice-principal in the past. As a result, I approached this study with some assumptions including perceptions about how discipline is done and moreover how it should be done. As a vice-principal, I focused on building relationships with my students, believing that this would impact the effectiveness of discipline. I expected the participants would speak to the effectiveness of positive student-educator relations. Through journaling, I was regularly able to record my beliefs and assumptions, making every effort to identify my potential partiality, as I sought to ensure that student perceptions were created by students and not by my assumptions.

At the time of interviewing, it had been 2 and a half years since I served in the position of vice-principal. As a result, I interviewed students in only grades 10 and 11, for these students never knew me in the role of vice-principal. In this way, the interviews did not act as a comparison of the current vice-principal and me. I did not want this

potential conflict to influence the students' views or my observations. As I began the process of initiating research at my own school, I first sought the permission of the Vice-Principal of Students responsible for discipline, recognizing that many student responses would refer to this position. I received this permission, for which I was very thankful.

I have spent almost half of my life working with teenagers. I was working with teenagers while I was still a teenager, working at summer camps, volunteering in high schools, coaching high school sports, and culminating in 4 years as a full-time professional youth worker. This is the background I bring to my teaching and my research. Despite my desire to uphold high school students, I ensured that the process was accurate and integral, making every effort to ensure that the study brought forth quality data. I assumed that each high school student would describe processes, methods, and stories that promoted his/her interests and rights, for it is one's nature to advocate for oneself.

### **Organization of Thesis**

This thesis contains five chapters. Chapter One establishes the context and rationale for this study. Furthermore, the chapter outlines the problems this study intends to research and on which the thesis is based. Chapter Two is a review of the literature relevant to this study. This literature has been used to form and guide this thesis. Chapter Three is an outline of the method used in this study for research purposes. The chapter presents the criteria for selecting participants, the size of the population studied, and the rationale for the process used to conduct the research. Chapter Four is a detailed synopsis of the findings of this study. Chapter Five presents discussion of the results that

have been discovered as a result of this research, then focuses on the implications of this discussion.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines literature relevant to the topic of student perceptions of discretion in discipline. The rationale for *student voice* as a legitimate and necessary source of data is established. The chapter continues with the foundation for *discipline* in schools and an examination of *discretion*. Previous studies examining *student views of discipline* are examined. The importance of the *student-educator relationship* is revealed via student views of discipline. Finally, the philosophical foundations of restorative justice are examined.

### **Student Voice**

Educational institutions entrust teachers and administration with exercising fair and just discipline, yet there are few provisions for ensuring accountability. One cannot always ensure that the judgment of educators is good judgment. To make certain the process involves all stakeholders, all relative perspectives including those of students must be regarded (Pomeroy, 1999). Students are people with rights, and by neglecting to listen to students, we neglect the rights of students (Charlton, 1996; Kohn, 1996). Lincoln (1995) argues that many students do not have a voice in education, for the current system silences students. Students bring a unique perspective to discussions, witnessing both teachers in classrooms and administration in their offices. This is a perspective rarely seen by other staff members (Belton, 1996). The low visibility of disciplinary decisions combined with the silenced voices of students opens the door for the exploitation of discretion in decision making.

### Discipline in High Schools

Warner (1975) believes that student behaviour is essential in order for teachers to properly carry out the learning process. In a study by Thorson (1996), a student described discipline as “a form of guidance where students learn the rules and procedures of society” (p. 16). Unfortunately, students often learn the punitive side of society. Traditional discipline employs punishment to bring about conformity (Adams, 2000). This approach reduces appropriate behaviour in classrooms to mere compliance (Kohn, 1996). Compliance should come as a result of responsibility to individuals and the community, as opposed to being an outcome of discipline (Cameron & Thorsborne, 1998). Hudson (2006) explains that *discipline* comes from the Latin word *disculpus*, meaning “to teach.” He says that discipline must be seen as discipleship, whereby the paradigm of discipline is transformed from a *compliance* focus to a *community* and relational focus. Compliance as an outcome of discipline extrinsically motivates students, whereas when students are intrinsically motivated through discipline, the result is social responsibility on the part of the student. Discipline should enable students to be successful. Compliance as a goal of discipline fails to serve the interests of students and does not address their rights. The needs of a student go far beyond conformity. Each student is a complex individual with particular needs. Through meeting these needs, students learn and change. If the goal of a school is developing a community that cares for students and enhances self-worth, then punishment must be significantly examined as an effective disciplinary process (Kohn).

Adams (2000) posits that in order to have effective discipline, *indiscipline* must be eliminated. Indiscipline describes the intrinsic problems in a disciplinary system. One

must consider the possibility that not all problems in discipline can be attributed to students (Kohn, 1996). Discipline can serve as a solution, but it can also be a systemic issue itself. For example, authoritative procedures that rely on conformity reinforce powerlessness, rebellion, and fear in students (Adams; Everett & Price, 1995). Students are often made to be the problem, while in reality the discipline *process* is the problem. It is rare that the core issues of disruptive behaviour are analyzed (Costenbader & Markson, 1998). Instead, disciplinary decisions are made for efficiency rather than in the interests of students. Students who need to be upheld the most by the educational system are unable to defend themselves, for they are quickly labeled as individuals who oppose the system. They seldom have the opportunity to voice their concerns. Yet they are the ones who can provide the most valuable information regarding the disciplinary process, for students best understand the process and how it works for and against them (Pomeroy, 1999). If schools are to serve all students, specifically those most affected by discipline, then disciplinary systems and procedures need to be analyzed using student perspectives.

### **Discretion**

Any form of discipline involves *discretion* (Sughrue, 2003). The justice system in a school is a flexible system. Each case differs, for each case involves different individuals in different circumstances (Baumgartner, 1992). Circumstances that require choices involve *discretion*; all definitions of discretion begin with the concept of choice (Bell, 1992). Feldman (1992) states that discretion is justly exercised when decisions are reasonably *justified*. Discretion is the “freedom to be influenced by factors other than the law” (Hawkins, 1992, p. 44). Given that discretion is essential to decision making, those who view discretion as an afterthought do not comprehend its power (Sossin, 1993).

The expectation within schools is that students are treated equally. The paradox is every discipline case is unique. The broad range of student interests in combination with the complexities and intricacies of each case mean that maintaining *equality* cannot be equivalent to disciplining students in the *same* way. Equal treatment is therefore applied as *fitting* treatment in school discipline (Komisar & Coombs, 1964). Fitting treatment is a difficult concept for many educators, as fitting verdicts are based on interpretations, opening decisions to discretion. In order to attempt to treat students the same, thereby eliminating discretion, some have proposed *zero tolerance policies*, or policies that theoretically leave no room for questioning decisions (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). The result of zero tolerance policies is the significant use of suspensions and expulsions in schools. These policies exclude students from the system quickly. Zero tolerance lacks due process, frees schools of the responsibility of preparing students for society, and often removes students from school for minor offenses (Adams, 2000). The use of zero tolerance to remove offending students from the school system—either temporarily or permanently—goes against the idea of inclusive education, a common ideal in a democratic society (Haft, 2000). Policies that aim to eliminate discretion and make discipline straightforward clearly are not in the best interest of the individual student.

To examine *discretionary power*, one must examine why it is impossible for educators to function without discretion. To act without discretion is to make decisions in a legalistic context. There is a paradox in the fact that legalistic decisions are not necessarily just decisions, for laws are made to protect. Sossin (1993) proposes that adherence to rules is the main problem of today's public administration. Decisions involve choices and ethics; this cannot be avoided. Educators frequently turn to legalistic



approaches to solve what are ethical issues. Yet to uphold the equality of students through fitting decisions is a moral, discretionary decision itself (Komisar & Coombs, 1964). Denying discretion puts limits on one's responsibility (Lipsky, 1980). As much as discretion can inhibit justice, it also enables leaders to provide it. Therefore it is essential that we entrust our leaders with discretionary power to serve the entire school community. Ultimately, the discretionary power of educators holds the hope of individuals for fair and just treatment.

### **Student Views of Discipline**

Power is an integral part of the disciplinary process. McCroskey and Richmond (1982) define power as "an individual's potential to have an effect on another person's or group of persons' behaviour" (p. 4). Students say that in a high school, power generally rests with the teacher (Jamieson & Thomas, 1974). McCroskey and Richmond analyze a teacher's power in an educational setting using the five forms of power proposed by French and Raven (in McCroskey & Richmond): *coercive* power, the power that exists in the student's perception of the ability of a teacher to punish a student for a given action; *reward power*, the power based on the student's perception of the ability of the teacher to offer rewards; *legitimate power*, the power granted to one by their professional or "assigned" position; *referent power*, the power that exists because of the relationship between two people; and *expert power*, power that exists due to a student's perception of a teacher's knowledge and competency. Power is only as strong as a student's perception of power. If the student does not perceive a teacher to have power—regardless of the type of power—then the influence of the power will be negligible. Jamieson and Thomas found that students experience a high degree of coercive power in the classroom,

experiencing that teacher's work under a very authoritarian model, creating an uneven distribution of power. Students respond that due to this uneven distribution of power, students often fail to express dismay with teachers or events, for they feel they will not be heard. As a result, student needs are not met. In order to give students a voice, teachers need to be deliberate in utilizing referent power over legitimate power, recognizing the negative effects of an authoritarian classroom and being intentional about giving students a voice.

In a study by Thorson (1996), high school students claimed it was essential to listen to both sides in disciplinary cases, for students sometimes are right and teachers sometimes are wrong. Nevertheless, students are in a position of little power when it comes to discipline, for discretion favours educators (Manley-Casimir, 1977). This fact, in combination with the potential for discretion to be used poorly or unjustly, puts students at a distinct disadvantage (Manley-Casimir, 1978). When a decision is based on the discretionary judgments of a single individual, the student is at the mercy of the teacher or administration, regardless of whether the judgments are in the student's best interest or not. The avenues for students to challenge discretionary decisions are almost nonexistent (Galloway, 1996; Lipsky, 1980). If information is available that may help a student's case, the information is not always used, since it is up to the disciplinarian to make information relevant (Feldman, 1992). The vulnerability of students reinforces the need for a due process that involves student voice. Schools must guard students from the abusive application of discretionary decisions (Manley-Casimir, 1999). Empowering students with the ability to be involved in disciplinary decisions works toward upholding a due process.

There are a handful of studies that have considered student views of discipline. Significant differences exist in student perceptions of fairness in discipline. Perceptions are as likely to be attributed to the process as they are to the resultant sanction (Wald & Kurlaender, 2003). Students are clear that discipline is necessary in schools (Thorson, 1996). As much as students dislike disciplinary procedures, a lack of disciplinary procedures does not help students. They say they are more comfortable in a school environment where rules are clearly defined (Beresford, 2000). Students believe that the best disciplinary processes are those that uphold justice to a very high degree (Lincoln, 1995). If discipline is done with respect, fairness, and with the needs of the student in mind, then students support the process (Pomeroy, 1999). They also maintain that discipline is dependent on the individual being disciplined, upholding the concept of employing fitting discipline. Students want those in authority to understand and consider the entire student before making disciplinary decisions (Thorson). High school students claim that the discipline process can be greatly improved, simply by investigating circumstances and *then* applying appropriate discipline (Lincoln).

Students who are not listened to allege they (and their opinions) are not valued by teachers (Pomeroy, 1999). This is a poor model from a profession that sets high expectations for listening. Students who are ignored wonder frequently whether or not their teacher cares about them (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Furthermore, students claim that yelling, humiliation, and sarcasm communicate that an educator does not value a student. The decision to publicly humiliate pupils was recognized by students as one of the most negative interactions students encounter (Pomeroy).

Student reaction is mixed in regards to the effectiveness of detentions. Some see them as very effective, whereas others claim detentions are not a deterrent (Thorson, 1996). Larson and Karpas (1967) describe detentions as a process through which one is able to “annoy the annoyer” (cited in Thorson, p. 6). Detentions may be used as revenge. Some students see detentions, along with calls to parents, as the most effective way to improve student behaviour and effort (Shreeve et al., 2002). Before one may consider the full effectiveness of detentions, one must consider the forms of discipline and redemptive processes students are exposed to. Many students and educators are unaware of other forms or theories of discipline. The discretionary authority of a given school or classroom simply may be limited to punitive forms of discipline due to ignorance, lack of education on the subject, or a lack of desire to move forward in changing the disciplinary paradigm.

Many students have experienced a disciplinary scenario whereby the punishment was based on the outcome of an action, not on the action itself. For example, two students each push a student in a hallway. In one instance, the student who was pushed breaks his wrist, whereas in the other instance the student who was pushed walks away. One student receives no punishment, whereas the student who broke the wrist does, even though both participated in similar actions. Studies show that students take exception to blanket punishments that do not consider the entire situation (Wald & Kurlaender, 2003). Rote enforcement, such as that meted out through zero tolerance policies is not favoured by students. In fact, students articulate that rote enforcement causes problems, for students resign to the fact that they are going to be punished as a result of zero tolerance discipline. Students in these situations rebel against disciplinarians, thereby

compounding problems. It is not the rules that are the problem but the lack of clarity or fairness in interpreting rules that students see as an issue (Thorson, 1996). Suspensions are not favoured by students. In the study by Wald and Kurlaender, students express the need for adult interaction with students prior to detentions and suspensions. The opportunity to mediate situations before falling back on punishment is seen by students to be effective. Furthermore, students say they like discipline that does not remove them from the school environment. Students want suspension to be an absolute last resort.

Literature reveals significant student passion and anger in regards to racial discrimination. First and foremost, students believe that racial discrimination exists (Pomeroy, 1999). Statistics show that the anger is warranted. In the United States, 17% of the student population is African American, yet they represent 32% of school suspensions (Sughrue, 2003). A larger percentage of ethnic minorities describe their relationship with teachers as poor. Students believe that schools are built around “middle-class” standards, creating frustration in lower class students, many of whom are ethnic minorities. Studies show that teachers have higher expectations for Caucasian students and tend to respond differently to Black students versus White students. Students say that if you are going to improve disciplinary procedures, then it is necessary to recognize and respond to the racial discrimination that occurs in school (Lincoln, 1995).

### **The Student-Educator Relationships and Discipline**

For students, *discipline* is a word that has negative connotations in a school setting. Yet many teachers discipline students using nonpunitive methods. Discipline implies responding to students in order to support students’ best interests. Through

discretionary choices, teachers and administration alike have the unique opportunity of impacting students in a positive way through discipline. Students are well aware of which educators are concerned about them and their learning. In fact, students say that if you want to improve discipline, you simply have to *care* (Lincoln, 1995). Students are connected to these teachers, for students experience care when teachers approach discipline with the student's well-being in mind (Wald & Kurlaender, 2003). Students believe discipline improves when educators show respect for all students (Lincoln). The *student-educator relationship* is a unique relationship that carries significant power for students. Students say that relationships with teachers are much more important than a teacher's ability to teach (Pomeroy, 1999). Positive relationships with educators in school decrease student aggression and increase academic success (Hughes, Cavell, & Jackson, 1999).

Students want changes in disciplinary proceedings. For students, ideal discipline includes discussion (Pomeroy, 1999). They want to be consulted and want to be assured that their interests are represented when they sit down to discuss issues (Lincoln, 1995). Students want to work with individuals who will talk through issues (Costenbader & Markson, 1998). Furthermore, students do not want to talk about consequences. They want to focus on community and communication and to learn alternative behaviours to the wrongs they have committed (Costenbader & Markson; Thorson, 1996). Creating a community environment whereby students can work with educators to resolve conflict is the first step towards establishing full social responsibility in students. Ultimately, schools can work toward providing students with the opportunity to solve their own problems (VanHecke & Buckingham, 1993).

### **Empowering Students in the Disciplinary Process**

Approaches to discipline that are effective are often not traditional approaches (Pomeroy, 1999). Jaeger (2005) argues for approaches to discipline that are creative and restorative. Justice is served when we enable students to contribute to discussion rather than be an object of discussion (Essex, 2002). Enabling and utilizing the voice of students allows justice to be fully served through a developed due process. Ultimately, schools should aim to build a fully democratic community (Kohn, 1996). Studies show a common link between opportunities for participation and well-developed management systems (Lincoln, 1995). Through opportunities to make decisions, students learn to make good and moral choices on their own rather than by being managed. A compassionate, honest, and forgiving discipline established *with* students, rather than done *to* students, can work in the interest of all parties involved (Adams, 2000). Welcoming student voice in discussion enables students and teachers to think through issues, make decisions, and derive logical consequences (Kohn; Lewis, 2001). Interventions that focus on resolution rather than disciplinary punishment are not common in schools, though they are not new either (Everett & Price, 1995). *Conflict resolution* disciplinary procedures—nonpunitive forms of discipline that aim to resolve conflict—are growing as a way to effectively resolve conflict (Adams).

If conflict resolution effectively prepares students for a democratic society, then perhaps the effectiveness of detentions must be questioned. The goal of educators should be to help students understand how to respond in real situations occurring beyond the walls of the school (Follett, 1928/1970). *Empowerment* is the ability to control one's environment. The interest of any society, including the school structure, is best served

when everyone in the society (including students!) is empowered. Those empowered learn to utilize available resources and actively work to correct wrongs that have been committed (Handler, 1992).

Conflict resolution approaches to discipline in schools arose out of social justice concerns in the 1960s and 1970s. In order to build the capacity to cope with social and emotional issues, students must involve themselves in learning that specifically addresses their social and emotional needs. The goal is to transform discipline from a punitive endeavour to a learning opportunity. Conflict resolution education engages various forms including dialogue, mediation, and *restorative justice* (Jones, 2006).

### **Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice is a form of conflict resolution that interprets discipline and misconduct as a wrongdoing against individuals as opposed to rule breaking (Cameron & Thorsborne, 1998). First and foremost, restorative justice is about individuals' needs, inviting dialogue and exploration following injustice. This includes the victim's and the offender's needs. Victims need answers and typically want to know the story of why they were involved in the conflict and need to be empowered to overcome what they have endured. Offenders need to be encouraged to take responsibility for their unjust actions and to understand the consequences of their actions (Zehr, 2002). Restorative justice works to repair injustices by involving *all* stakeholders of an incident in the restoration process (Center for Justice and Reconciliation, 2005). The process encourages student dialogue, and school officials feel more accountable for the classroom and school practices, bringing accountability to the resolution process. Restorative justice is primarily seen as an action against punitive measures of discipline which bring



brokenness to school relationships, thereby harming overall school community. Breaking school rules and policies is secondary to broken relationships. Restorative justice takes some discipline out of the hands of educators and puts it into the hands of stakeholders, specifically students (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). Restorative justice addresses many of the student needs addressed previously in this chapter including lack of voice, lack of empowerment, and the focus on laws instead of relationships. In a disciplinary situation, restorative justice focuses on the question, “how can we make this right?” as opposed to “how can I solve this problem?” (Amstutz & Mullet). By involving all stakeholders in a process through which an incident is discussed, the use of discretion is used for the greater good—students’ needs and best interests—rather than in the best interests of an educator.

Follett said (1928/1970), “Cooperation is the basis of freedom, not the sacrifice of freedom” (p. 12). Many see the opportunity of working in community with students as a loss of power rather than an opportunity for positive change. The co-operation of educators and students has the potential to change student-educator relationships and ultimately the effectiveness of our educational institutions. Taking the initial steps of moving forward with inquiring of students about what they believe in regards to discretion in discipline may work towards establishing a communal environment in our schools, potentially opening doors for educators to work in community with students to employ restorative processes that can uphold students’ best interests.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This chapter illustrates the *methodology* of this study: the beliefs about knowledge and the theoretical structure. In addition, the chapter describes the *methods* used in this study: the tools and processes used to gather evidence (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). The chapter begins with the rationale for utilizing student voice in research. Next, the motivation and justification for employing *generic qualitative research* as the foundation of this study are discussed. Furthermore, the chapter presents the rationale for the research method, specifically interviewing, and the specific aspects of this method that were taken into consideration including: the criteria for selecting the research site, the potential interview candidates, the method of data collection, and how the data were analyzed. Finally the chapter examines the methodological assumptions and the ethical considerations in this study.

#### **Rationale for Methodology and Methods**

Student voice is fundamentally important to education. To move forward in meeting students' needs, one must take note of student voice. Hammersley and Woods (cited in Smith, 2000) elucidate this point:

There can be little doubt that pupils' own interpretations of school processes represent a crucial link in the educational chain. Unless we understand how pupils respond to different forms of pedagogy and school organization and why they respond in the ways they do, our efforts to increase the effectiveness, or to change the impact of schooling, will stand little chance of success. (p. 304)

Though seldom given the opportunity, students are capable of extending us. Only history or current paradigms prohibit educators from involving students in all aspects of their

education (Lincoln, 1995). The inability of administrators and teachers to listen to students ultimately hurts students the most, for they lose their own voice. It also harms educators, for the opportunity is lost to extend knowledge of student perceptions (Charlton, 1996). Educators need to be vulnerable and recognize students' views (Galloway, 1996). Not only must teachers listen to student voices, but they need to be clear that they honour them (Lincoln). Beyond observing students, teachers and administrators must speak to students in order to understand them and to validate student opinions (Charlton).

A student who is heard and not listened to is a student who loses trust in the educational process, disciplinary or otherwise. Lincoln (1995) believes that teachers often underestimate a student's ability to assess and communicate regarding their learning environment. In the exceptional times that teachers consult students, they find significant worth in the personal experiences and self-analyses students are able to convey (Galloway, 1996). Students must truly be coparticipants in the educational—specifically the disciplinary—system. Participation comes through voice (Galloway; Innes et al., 2001). It is essential that school officials listen to students, for students can relay how they are impacted by the claims teachers and administration make. Ideas and meaning that students reveal are often outside the thoughts of educators. Listening to students creates co-operative learning as opposed to top-down learning (Innes et al.). When educators are vulnerable and listen to student voice, schools change. Student perspectives and experience are foundational for transforming schools (Pomeroy, 1999). Students' stories bring new perspective to the existing educational paradigm where discipline in high schools is typically controlled by educators, providing little to no

participation by students (Wachtel, 1999b). Without a voice, students are left to abide by the discretionary decisions made by educators.

Qualitative research, specifically interviewing, allows a researcher to elicit student voice, creating a holistic picture of the participants as individuals and as a group. Furthermore, qualitative research enables the researcher to bring personal values to the study, for the researcher can form questions and the study around personal interests or beliefs. Qualitative research works to obtain descriptive data from its natural setting by focusing on participant perceptions and experiences (Creswell, 1994). Empowering students by enabling them to share personal testimonies regarding personal choices and discretion employed by educators during the disciplinary process fulfills the purpose of the study. Ultimately, the study aims to allow students to advocate for their best interests.

### **Foundation for Generic Qualitative Research**

Merriam (cited in Caelli et al., 2003) describes generic qualitative research as a design that seeks to “discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (p. 3). Generic qualitative research is not guided by a specific qualitative methodology. In order for a qualitative study to be effective, the study must be founded and conducted according to its methodological basis. Caelli et al. propose four research points for conducting credible generic qualitative research: *theoretical positioning of the researcher, congruence of methodology and methods, strategies to establish rigor, and an analytic lens through which data are examined.*

#### *Theoretical Positioning*

The theoretical position of a researcher refers to the motivations, assumptions,

and past experiences that motivate a researcher to engage in a specific topic (Caelli et al., 2003). Through my work with high schools students, I learned to engage with teenagers and to become an advocate for their rights and personal well-being. Through a series of unforeseen events, I was provided the opportunity to serve as a vice-principal in my current organization for 18 months. Through this experience, I was able to utilize my relational skills with teenagers in a disciplinary setting. During my tenure, I realized that high school students were not always provided the opportunity to voice their views during disciplinary proceedings. I found that in the heat of a disciplinary scenario, I could easily stray from my beliefs, often resorting to methods of discipline that did not uphold the worth of students. Recognizing my actions, I yearned to ensure that high school students were provided an opportunity to speak. As a result, I came to this research seeking the voices of high school students.

Through my studies at Brock University, the power of discretion in educators was revealed to me. I recognized the power of discretion, when misused, could serve as a huge stumbling block in the ability to empower students. When used appropriately, discretion has the power to empower our students, preparing them to be responsible citizens upon their graduating from high school. The questions used in my research reflect my desire to acknowledge students as a credible source of information by encouraging students to express their ideas and concerns regarding discretion, choices, process, and student-educator relations as they relate to high school discipline.

#### *Congruence of Methodology and Methods*

Caelli et al. (2003) state:

Assumptions and principles that inform a generic study may not be based on the

well established theoretical traditions that inform each of the established approaches, but the research choices made in any generic study are still informed by a set of assumptions, preconceptions, and beliefs. (p. 16)

The number of variables when studying decision making, specifically *discretion in discipline*, are plentiful. Furthermore, the variables are difficult to quantify. Decisions are bounded in numerous conditions. Discipline is a decision-based discretionary process, and therefore illuminating decisions is integral in this study. A method that enabled me as the researcher to heed the varied views, beliefs, opinions, and observations of high school students was important for conducting this study.

*Interviews* are a valuable method for acquiring qualitative data. Much of what we want to learn about cannot be observed by the researcher. Interviews enable a researcher to seek out relevant data, for interviews enable researcher control of data collection (Stake, 1995). The interview is an essential source of evidence, for interviews enable human interaction (Yin, 2003b). The interview with students enabled me as a researcher to learn from the participants that which I would otherwise never encounter (Creswell, 2003; Dilley, 2004). As much as educators are in a school every day, the hundreds of students that surround educators have a perspective that reaches far beyond that which educators experience.

*Grounded theory* is a research design whereby the researcher studies participants to discover significant data about the participants through multiple stages of data collection in order to discover interrelationships amongst the data and to build theories. The intention of this research is not to build theory. Nor does the limited number of participants lend this study to creating a theory. However, aspects of *grounded theory*

analysis still enable one to systematically examine qualitative data from interviews or otherwise (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1999). As a result, establishing this study as a generic qualitative study, employing interviews of 6 high school students as the primary method of data collection, is consistent with the purpose and rationale presented.

### *Rigor*

Rigor is ensuring the credibility of a study (Caelli et al., 2003). Traditionally in a qualitative study, this would include the study's reliability and validity. Charmaz (2006) encourages qualitative researchers to consider *credibility*, *originality*, and *usefulness*. Several steps have been taken to ensure that this study upholds the ideals of rigor, using Charmaz's concepts. To ensure my work is *credible*, I have enveloped myself in the topic. I delved into relevant literature and continue to reflect on the topic in my work as an educator. To ensure the responses I received from students were extensive and well thought out, I provided students with a copy of the questions prior to the interview. Furthermore, students were provided with a copy of the interview transcript so they could edit or add to the data. I have maintained clarity in the purpose of this study, maintaining that this is a descriptive study rather than a theory building study. Furthermore, I have clarified my assumptions, recognizing my significant history of working with adolescents and high schools students, and how my experiences have encouraged me to pursue this research. I maintained a journal throughout the research process to ensure I consistently questioned my assumptions and beliefs to ensure my research was a reflection of the participants' responses rather than my own beliefs. Furthermore, the journal clarified the influence the research had on me.

Prior to the execution of research, my advisor and two committee members reviewed my proposal in order to ensure that I created and conducted a credible study. The questions were analyzed to ensure that they upheld the purpose and problem statements of this research.

Prior to interviewing, an ethics review was conducted by the Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB). Approval of my ethics application ensured the safety of the participants, my organization, and me in conducting this study (See Appendix A).

The literature review for this study was extensive. This ensured that the rationale for the study and the methodology were grounded in relevant literature.

A pilot interview was conducted prior to commencing research to ensure the questions were reliable, to make certain that the interview was appropriate both in length and in location, and to ensure the data that were taken from the interview were credible. Furthermore, I analyzed these data and brought them back to the pilot participant to walk through the process of providing participants with the opportunity of editing their information. The pilot interview data were not used in the final results of this study.

Finally, interviews were recorded with an audio device to provide word-for-word data with participant intonation, thereby providing quality data. Ultimately, participants can trust that the data collected were an accurate, honest, and reliable representation of their personal thoughts, beliefs, and insight.

In terms of *originality*, this study researched a topic that is generally underdeveloped. Participants confirmed data from previous studies but also brought new ideas and concepts to the topic of *student perceptions of discretion in discipline*. This work provides a basis for future studies in this area.



As a *useful* study, this work potentially can further educational institutions in how they conduct discipline for students' best interests. In a high school, educators are ultimately seeking to consistently better the education of each and every student. This study provides data that enable educators to uphold students through examining how high schools conduct discipline for the students' sake. Creating dialogue that encourages educators to examine current practice benefits everyone in our schools.

The preceding steps work to ensure the rigor of this study.

### *The analytic lens*

As a past youth worker and a current educator, my goal is to be an advocate for students' best interests and the education system. Through my studies, I recognized the power of discretion in decision making as it relates to discipline. The work of Manley-Casimir (1999) on discretion, Belton (1996) on effective discipline, and Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004) on students' rights worked to create a point of entry for this study. Through researching literature examining past studies involving high school students, the concept of the student-educator relationship was revealed. This literature propelled me towards creating my interview questions. As the study progressed, restorative justice literature influenced my Chapter Five analysis as I sought to examine discipline from a restorative perspective in an educational context.

The credibility of generic qualitative research as the research design for this study was upheld through: establishing my theoretical positioning as a researcher, upholding the congruence of my methodology and my methods, employing strategies to establish rigor, and establishing an analytic lens through which to establish this study and examine the results.

### Site and Participant Selection

I chose to conduct this research at my own institution. Zeni (2001a) states three reasons for undertaking an insider study: *personal*, *professional*, and *political*. My study was personal, for I wanted to grow in my knowledge of this subject area. My study was professional, for I desired to grow as an educator, and I hoped that my study enabled high schools to move forward in terms of disciplining students for their best interests. Finally, there was some political motivation to my study. I wanted to learn how the voices of students could be used to further their own interests. This is not a favorable topic for many educators. Many of the areas of study—speaking with students, eliciting student voices, restorative justice—are areas that require significant time and energy to establish and deliver. Nevertheless, my goal in this research was to show that utilizing student voice for students' best interest is ultimately in the interest of the entire school community. My organization gave me permission to conduct interviews in my school and to look at documents relevant to participant selection.

The study was conducted in a soundproofed room with a window. The soundproofed room protected the students and the information that they shared. The window protected me, ensuring that a teacher and a student were not alone and out of sight. Interviews were conducted in the Student Services region of the school, an area removed from where discipline takes place.

The interviews were conducted with 3 male and 3 female students in grades 10 and 11 in the school at which I teach. I chose students who were not at the school while I was vice-principal, for I did not want these interviews to be a comparison of administrative styles. Rather, I wanted to allow students to focus on the interview

questions according to their perceptions. This made the interview process much easier and more reliable, enabling students to focus on the topic at hand.

Yin (2003a) states that it is necessary to identify criteria for selecting and screening potential research candidates. Participants were chosen according to different levels of discipline. The first 2 students had been suspended over the previous 2 years for varying offenses. The second 2 students had received a *greensheet* over the previous 2 years, but not suspended. In my organization, the greensheet is a formal record of discipline that is completed when a student is sent to the office. The offenses for which a student receives a greensheet vary widely. Nevertheless, a student is sent down when his or her behaviour is deemed, at the discretion of the teacher, to be unfit for the classroom environment. The final 2 participants were students who had received neither a suspension nor a greensheet. This does not guarantee that the participants had received no discipline in the classroom, but these students had steered clear of formal administrative discipline. Students who have not faced formal discipline have as much to say about disciplinary procedures as those who have been formally disciplined. In some instances, these students use techniques to avoid the consequences of discipline, whereas others act so as to never warrant discipline.

I chose students by making a list of all of the candidates available in each of the three categories. My organization provided a list of students who had been suspended and a list of students who had received greensheets. Students whom I taught or would teach during the 2007-2008 academic school year were omitted from the potential participants in order that the possibility of bias and coercion could be eliminated. I randomly selected 1 male and 1 female student from each category by drawing names. Each student was

individually invited to the room where I was to conduct interviews, read a brief overview of the study, and invited to participate in the study. The student was then given a letter of invitation to be involved with the study. Students were given 5 days to decide whether or not they would like to be involved with the study. I made it clear that their participation was not mandatory and that they could choose to leave the study at any time.

Furthermore, I informed participants that they could not expect their responses to change current practices and structures in the school. In this way, students would not be persuaded to make responses specifically designed to influence their school.

Of the original 6 students, 2 chose not to participate. I repeated the process until 6 participants had agreed to be a part of the study. Once the participants were selected, they were given a consent form that was to be signed by the participant and a letter of assent to be signed by the participant's parent or guardian, outlining the process and the limitations of the study. When the consent form and assent form were returned, participants selected dates within a 2 week period on which to conduct the interview. The 60-minute interviews were conducted outside class time (after school or in professional days following January exams) to ensure no class time was missed as a result of participating in the study.

### **Data Collection**

Stake (1995) instructs that most data that cannot be observed by the researcher are being observed by others. A face-to-face interview enabled me to control the interview to elicit perceptions and observations of a student as they related to my research area. I also maintained a personal journal throughout the entirety of the study to record thoughts, assumptions, insights, and questions I had throughout the research process.

Students were given a copy of the interview questions from the interview guide prior to the study so students were aware of the questions that were asked (See Appendix B). Prior to commencing the research, students were informed of their right to exit this study at any time throughout the research process. They were made aware that every effort would be made to ensure their data remained anonymous. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the student's identity was protected when transcribing and analyzing the data. Nevertheless, students were made aware that because I am a teacher, in rare cases it would not be possible to ensure confidentiality because of mandatory reporting laws (e.g., suspected child abuse) or the possibility of third party access to data (e.g., court subpoena of records). Furthermore, information divulged by the participant that could lead to the harming of the participant or others could have been given over to appropriate authorities.

An electronic audio recording device was used to ensure accuracy and to preserve implications brought about through the interviewee's tone. Though some students may be uncomfortable with being recorded, this enabled me as a researcher to focus on the questions being asked and to write down personal observations that stemmed from what was being said by the student. Confidentiality was ensured to protect both the participants and the school staff. This included not using the name of my institution in this study. Nevertheless, students were told that anonymity could not be guaranteed due to the small number of participants

With the help of my thesis advisor and my committee members, the questions were written to establish an early context from which students could speak. If a student (or anyone) could root him/herself in a personal context from which to answer the

questions, then the responses could be personal and spoken with ease (Stake, 1995). The interview was a standardized open-ended interview whereby the initial questions were established prior to the interview. I guided students using these initial questions. Providing the questions to the participants beforehand and creating an environment whereby the interviewee could respond to open questions created a fluid conversation and relieved participant stress.

A pilot interview was conducted with a student from the school prior to starting my interviews. A pilot interview allowed me as a researcher to gain feedback about my questions and interview techniques. This student was afforded all of the opportunities given to participants including the invitation process, anonymity, the ability to exit the study at any time, and a review of their transcript. In this way, I was able to walk through the entire process and evaluate my procedures. As stated by Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002), the “ultimate goal is to obtain valid responses and to record the responses accurately and completely” (p. 121). Ensuring the procedures and the interview questions were reliable worked in ensuring the overall credibility of the study. Following the pilot interview, it became evident that further understanding high school students’ views of the word *discipline* was necessary to more fully comprehend students’ connotations of the word discipline. I noted that it might be necessary to expand my questioning in order to gain valuable data. In addition, I modified my method of transcribing, eliminating students’ use of “umms” and pauses, for the pilot participant found these gestures to be distracting when reading the transcript.

A qualitative study enables the researcher to collaborate with participants (Creswell, 2003). I transcribed the interviews upon completion of data collection and

subsequently returned the transcripts to the participants. Through a letter of participant feedback, I provided students with the opportunity to add, delete, or clarify their responses to ensure they were comfortable with the data provided for the study. Participants were also informed of where they could find the final study, and participants will be provided with an overview of the conclusions of the study.

### **Data Analysis**

In qualitative studies, it is essential that researchers reduce the data to determine the unit of analysis. Once I received a final edited copy of the transcripts from the participants, I initiated a two-step process of *coding* the data (See Appendix C). The *initial coding* process as described by Charmaz (2006) used *line by line coding* to bring meaning to the stories of the students. Following this, I used *focused coding*, which “requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely” (p. 57). From this analysis, I developed six major categories into which the data were channeled as they related to student perceptions of discretion in discipline: *a definition of discipline, resolution versus punishment, effective processes, educator discretion, student discretion, and the student-educator relationship*.

Once the data were channeled into the categories, I started to write *memos*. Memos are a “pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). The memos allowed me to begin the actual writing process, enabling the gathering of categorical data and comparing the related data to the participants and their specific level of discipline. Through memos the findings were further organized and formalized. The font in the digital transcript of each participant was colour coded in order to track the data throughout the writing process.

As an advocate of student empowerment and students' best interests, the data were organized around the theory of restorative justice, using the work of Zehr (2005), Amstutz and Mullet (2005), and Wachtel (1999b), focusing on both new insights and data which confirmed previous studies. Significant statements that arose in the course of the interviews that could not be thematically placed were also analyzed in the final narrative.

### **Methodological Assumptions**

I assumed that high school students could present rich and in-depth insight through the questions I chose, and I assumed that a time frame of an hour was adequate for interviewing. As a corollary to this, I assumed that the questions I chose could be answered in an hour. Some students were passionate about specific topics. I wanted to uphold the passion of the students while at the same time not exhausting them by keeping them for a longer period of time than they could handle. Ultimately, the time frame worked well, as interviews ranged from 50 to 63 minutes in length.

I assumed that I could learn about the concept of discretion without using the word discretion in my interview questions. In my efforts to solidify the idea of discretion, I took courses and read significant literature on the subject. From what I have learned, I assumed that students were mostly unfamiliar with the power and depth of the word *discretion*. I worked around the ideas of choices, decisions, and fairness to try to establish a basis from which I could deduce student perceptions of discretion in discipline. The questions created rich data, revealing students' perceptions of discretion in regards to not only teachers but also their peers and themselves.

I assumed that those who read this study would take the voices of students seriously and heed their advice when looking to assess disciplinary procedures. This



remains to be seen. I do not expect this study to be earth shattering by any means, but my hope is that it will be combined with other current literature on the subject to establish a more solid foundation for future studies in students' views of discretion in discipline.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study has the potential to provide both benefits and risks for given populations. To protect myself, my organization, and the participants, I ensured the study was approved by the Brock University Ethics board (file # 07-112) before proceeding. If either benefits are lost or risks are brought to fruition, then this study would lose its impact and credibility. The following section looks at the benefits that could accrue from this research and then aims to show how every effort was made to mitigate the risks.

#### *Potential Benefits*

Ultimately this is a study to benefit students. First and foremost, the study aims to show that student voices can be heard and listened to and then utilized. The entire educational community, but specifically students, need to know that their voices can have an impact. These voices need to go far beyond disciplinary procedures. Creating a school environment whereby students are empowered to use their voice for the betterment of education is a potential benefit for all schools.

This study benefits those students who are a square peg in a round hole when it comes to education. Schools often uphold students who excel in academics, athletics, or the arts. Students who find themselves in a rotating cycle of discipline, where punishment leads to more punishment, need a voice. These voices should be heard, enabling educators to understand better how the best interests of students can be upheld.

This study benefits educators, both teachers and administrators, to understand where discretionary power is helping our students and where it is failing our students. If educators can examine and question the current disciplinary paradigm in terms of seeking each individual student's best interest, then this study benefits the entire school community.

This study has already been a benefit to me. The research has implications for developing a new system of discipline in my school. Through this research I have been moved by the concept of restorative justice as a disciplinary process in high schools. It is my intention to continue to pursue how this concept can be implemented in my high school, and then in other high schools, to ensure the best interests of all students are upheld.

#### *Mitigating Risks*

Every effort was made to protect the anonymity of participants. The participating students needed to know that they could be honest regarding their perceptions of current disciplinary practices both in the classroom and in the school office. Every participant received a pseudonym to protect their identity. The research data will be stored in two digital copies and a paper copy in my home. The interview recordings and the data will be destroyed 2 years after completion of the study.

In the process of interviewing, I learned more than I already knew regarding disciplinary practices that occur behind closed doors both in the classrooms and in administrative offices of my school. This study is not an evaluation or critique of my colleagues. As an insider researcher, I have a responsibility to ensure the data do not disclose my fellow educators and their practices. In fact, I chose not to write some details

when a specific story or instance was linked to a specific educator. Because of the ability of one to link me with my school, I needed to use significant discretion myself in how I presented the data.

Finally, as an insider researcher, I needed to take special precautions. In order to maintain an ethical balance, a researcher must define the roles for oneself, the participants, and the organization early in the study (Kanuha, 2000). I am an insider as an educator, but on a certain level I am an outsider to the students and my colleagues as a researcher. I needed to continually remind myself throughout the process that I was still a professional in my school and I could not overstep those bounds even though I was seeking rich and relevant data. This meant editing transcripts to eliminate certain data if I felt they were in conflict with my role as a teacher in the school, in my role as a professional, or if I deemed it could harm my colleagues or the participants.

Zeni (2001b) suggests that because of the constant ethical considerations in an insider study, for an ethical review to be meaningful, it cannot occur simply at the start of the study. Ethical reviews in insider research are ongoing and flexible. Throughout the process—in developing the study, writing the ethics proposal, conducting the pilot interview, conducting the research interviews, during transcription, while coding, writing the results, and during final analysis—I needed to consider where I was at in the study and how my decisions could impact the participants, my colleagues, and the school itself.

### **Summary**

The voices of students provide valuable insight into the processes used by educators in disciplining students. This credibility of this generic qualitative study is upheld through ensuring the consistency and compatibility of the theoretical positioning,

the methodology and the methods, the rigor with which strategies were established, and the analytic lens through which the study is founded and analyzed. As a generic qualitative study utilizing open-ended interviews, this research enables the researcher to access the thoughts, beliefs, and observations of 6 high school participants. Careful consideration in terms of ethics, site selection, data collection, and data analysis worked toward ensuring the integrity of the data.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter reflects the findings of this investigation as they relate to the purpose of the study of *student perceptions of discretion in discipline*. Data were collected from 6 high school student participants. Three male students and 3 female students in grades 10 and 11 each participated in a one-hour interview. Kaleb and Kelsie had been suspended at their school. Michael and Marissa had been formally disciplined but not suspended. Julie and Jonah had not been formally disciplined. Using a process of initial coding and focused coding as described by Charmaz (2006), the data were coded into six major categories relating to student perceptions of discretion in discipline: a *definition of discipline, resolution versus punishment, effective processes, educator discretion, student discretion, and the student-educator relationship*. This chapter provides details on the findings resulting from this study.

### **Participants' Definition of Discipline—A Punitive Paradigm**

Every participant expressed the belief that educators intend high school discipline to be executed in a student's best interest. They noted that educators use discipline to correct student behavior and to help them learn from their actions, with the hope of negating recidivism. Nevertheless, participants felt that "*punitive*" methods of discipline, implemented so that students could learn through *consequences*, prevented participants from accepting discipline as being in their best interest.

The word discipline had negative connotations for 5 of the 6 participants, equating *discipline* with *punishment*. Half of the participants said the first thing they thought of when they heard the word discipline was "getting in trouble." For example, Kaleb referred to discipline as "a punishment or something negative in the end, like a

negative task or chore.” Michael depicted discipline as punitive, describing it as “getting in trouble for doing bad stuff—consequences basically—authority letting you know you can not do that.” For Julie, who had experienced no formal discipline, the word discipline had neutral connotations. Nevertheless, she still equated discipline with punishment, for she expressed that executing discipline without threat or punishment was not possible. Jonah, who had also experienced little formal discipline, initially equated discipline with detentions. However, as the interview progressed he remarked that “when they [teachers] talk to you about the class and what you are doing wrong and stuff, then it qualifies as discipline.”

All participants believed the purpose of “discipline” was to ensure student behaviour was corrected and was to prevent students from reoffending. This purpose was seen as legitimate by participants, yet when executed through punitive means, participants believed that discipline lost its value. They observed that educators carry out discipline by frustrating students, with the hope that the suffering endured would prevent a student from repeating the same offense. Participants said that the motivation for a student to stop offending came not in the understanding of the wrong committed but rather in the hope that the student would *learn through consequences*. As Kelsie stated, “it [discipline] has a positive outcome if you, like, learn something and do not do it again.” She added that it was necessary for a student to experience consequences as a result of his/her actions. Michael articulated, “If they aren’t fearing consequences, then they aren’t being disciplined—they aren’t learning. They don’t change their actions.” Kelsie conveyed that discipline often utilizes consequences which involve *taking away a right or privilege* of a student (e.g., detentions—utilizing the student’s time outside of

class time or taking away one's cell phone) or involve a punitive task (washing desks or collecting recycling). The combination of losing a right or privilege combined with a punitive task was seen by Kelsie as effective, if effective is defined as preventing reoffending. Jonah thought that an effective punishment made a student upset, but not too upset, for if the punishment was too harsh the student would become retributive and make the conflict personal, seeking to make life miserable for the teacher or administrator. Marissa added that for discipline to be successful, the educator and the student should be content with the outcome.

Five of the 6 participants were unable to see the value of labeling a process as "discipline." They stated that the punitive associations of the term inhibited an outcome that was in the best interest of students. Participants suggested that change was more likely to occur when harsh punitive measures were removed. Although Jonah spoke of a need for harshness in discipline in the beginning of his interview, later, when discussing effective discipline through conversation, he noted, "when they talk to you about the class and what you are doing wrong and stuff, then it qualifies as discipline," adding that one cannot equate harshness with being effective. Kaleb evinced that discipline is not a process through which one *resolves* conflict. He was unable to equate discipline with any form of resolution, stating "I don't know if there is *effective discipline*—I'd say it's more solving things through conversation and seeing eye-to-eye on a certain thing." Though each of the participants spoke of discipline itself as being negative, each was also able to tell stories of educators who had effectively resolved difficult situations.

### **Disciplinary Punishment Versus Problem Resolution**

Participants believed in the *necessity of discipline*. Nevertheless, they sought to

explain a *student's* rationale for utilizing discipline to *resolve* conflict, describing the benefits of resolving issues and conflict over the pitfalls of utilizing discipline.

Participants were unanimous in the *necessity of discipline* and insisted on educators being proactive. Kaleb was forthright in stating that many times he deserves to be punished. Julie spoke to being hurt by other students, desiring them to be punished and apologize for their actions. Marissa recounted a time when, after making an inappropriate gesture towards a teacher, she was removed from class. Though she felt the teacher was being unfair, she knew her action was inappropriate and needed to be dealt with. Despite feeling brought down by the disciplinary system, Kelsie stated that she respected educators who worked with students in bringing about positive change. Though she has not directly requested help from her teachers, she seeks guidance and wants teachers to know that their efforts to help students are crucial. She expressed her frustration with educators who have failed to respond to inappropriate or unjust words or actions. Likewise, Julie said students become frustrated when they see something inappropriate going on in class without a response from the teacher. She said students want to know, "Why are they not doing anything?" Julie said that students recognize the ineffectiveness of an educator's failure to respond, lose patience, and become frustrated with the situation and the classroom environment. She suggested a command style approach would be effective, making expectations clear and simply telling the student to "sit down" or "be quiet." Kelsie appreciated teachers who called out students for their inappropriateness. All of the participants yearned for educators who were proactive in responding to conflict.



When describing the rationale for problem *resolution* over disciplinary *punishment*, Kaleb referred to punishment as an act that leaves things unresolved. He stated that when a punitive measure is used to deal with conflict, those involved in the conflict “tuck it [the conflict] away somewhere.” The conflict still lingers! Michael added that if you do not deal with the issue itself, then when those involved in the conflict come back together, things are the same as before. He proposed that in all likelihood, a similar punishment would be used to resolve the conflict when it happened again. Kaleb focused on the need to “actually solve the conflict so there is no underlying drama or anything like that when you come back.” All of the participants believed that the failure to resolve issues made most situations worse. They observed that negative emotions build up in both educators and students when situations are not worked through. A teacher’s tolerance for a student is reduced when issues are not resolved. Jonah stated that when an issue is not dealt with, “the next day the teacher will still have a grudge on them—they’ll get in trouble faster than other people.” Similarly, Michael held that students are likely to reengage with comparable negative actions with the teacher or other students when things are unresolved, for emotions cause them to continue the conflict. Without proper resolution conflict remains and emotions run high, resulting in a cycle of negative actions. Kaleb added that though every situation needs to be dealt with, sometimes responding to an issue *immediately* is not productive for the educator or the student.

Marissa said that the goal of discipline for educators is to deter students from repeating their actions. It is effective on some level, for many students fear consequences. Nevertheless, it is not a long-term solution, for when the hope sought

through certain measures fails to work, teachers become frustrated and resort to other methods. Jonah described such a scenario:

Sometimes, they'll [the teacher] be like "I just talked to you yesterday about this – now you can go to the office because I met with you and you don't even care what I talked about." So they'll just send you down to the office—not even talk to you or anything.

Kelsie, who had been disciplined frequently, described the disciplinary process as "useless." Describing a detention, she stated, "I'll never do it [go to a detention] to learn something or to do the right thing—I'll just do it to get out of trouble." Kelsie once cared about being a successful student, but now she feels exhausted by being repeatedly disciplined. For both Kelsie and Kaleb, the more they were punished, the less they feared punishment. Jonah upheld this when he declared that regular offenders simply do not care about discipline that repeatedly punishes students.

All of the participants emphasized the ineffectiveness of utilizing the same disciplinary punishment over and over. Kaleb believed that repeated disciplinary procedures were used because they acted as short-term solutions; yet the big picture was ignored. He stated, "It's like repairing something broken—if you don't repair it good [*sic*] it's just going to keep breaking." Jonah expressed that it was necessary to break this habitual cycle of repeated discipline for one to have any hope of reaching students who do not care.

Julie believed that discipline can be effective; it just depends on *how* students are disciplined. Participants expressed that positively changing students through education is promising, but for this to happen educators must begin by recognizing the value of each

student, regardless of their history. Jonah said that when working towards resolution, a disciplinary process that gives students hope makes all of the difference.

### **Effective Processes for Disciplinary Resolution**

Participants described processes that would enable educators and students alike to work towards resolving conflict with students' best interests in mind. Students expressed the need for *clear expectations, listening to students, student-educator conversations, and just processes.*

#### *Clear Expectations*

All of the participants believed the disciplinary process was more effective when *expectations* were set out early in a class. Julie suggested that students have a high regard for teachers when they make expectations and consequences clear. Michael believed that discipline was less likely to be necessary when students understood the expectations, for each student was clear on what acceptable behaviour was defined to be. Marissa elaborated on this, expressing that it is much easier for a teacher to "rein in a class" when expectations are clear, for the teacher can explain which line has been crossed. Kelsie proposed that students find it difficult when there are no expectations, for students do not react well to expectations that appear to be made up in the moment for a particular event or incident.

Participants agreed that expectations alone are not enough. Expectations must come out of a clear and suitable rationale. Julie believed it was not enough to simply say a student was wrong, for in addition an educator needs to say *what* is wrong. She suggested that if a teacher could not provide this rationale, then perhaps the teacher should question the discipline being used. Students lose respect for teachers when they

are unable to defend their actions. Michael stated that firmness and consistency create a positive fear in students, for they understand the consequences of a given action. He explained that consistency and firmness act as preventative measures rather than reactionary ones. Marissa added that if discipline is done in an atmosphere of gentleness and respect, then students are more likely to respond positively to an educator's expectations.

### *Listening*

All of the participants expressed that positive interaction begins with the educator *listening to the student*. Kaleb described listening to a student's story as a minimum response that must take place in every disciplinary situation, for telling one's story allows a student to explain or defend himself. Participants said that the act of students sharing their stories initiates students being involved in the resolution process. Julie believed acting without listening was unfair to students and the process. Michael expressed anger at not being listened to as he stated, "Your story doesn't get heard sometimes—and then you get disciplined and it's like, well, what the heck—I am wasting my time!" He recalled that in these situations emotions run high, and the result is the student and the educator end up arguing with each other with a small likelihood of resolution. Michael thought that sometimes students really are not aware of why they are being disciplined, creating an environment of frustration and making the student believe the educator is out to get them.

Kelsie expressed that a student feels let down when they are not listened to. Marissa added that students are disappointed when they are not listened to, for sometimes resolution could be accomplished more efficiently and effectively through a small one-

on-one conversation rather than involving school administrators. She believed a lot of conflict could be avoided and a lot of time saved if educators chose to listen. Marissa believed that every student deserves to be listened to, regardless of the situation. Nevertheless, she understood that every circumstance is different, and therefore this is not always easily accomplished.

### *Student-Educator Conversations*

Michael pushed for educators to go beyond listening and engage in *conversations* with students. This is consistent with Pomeroy (1999), who found students needed discussion for discipline to be genuine. Students want to share their stories, but they also want to hear the educator's side of the story. Michael said that when both parties are open to conversing, the likelihood of resolution increases. He told a story of being unjustly removed from Physical Education class:

I got kicked out of the class, so I was just sitting there watching and giving commentary to the game, and then he sends me to the office, and I am like, "Why? I was just standing there talking." And then I finally talked to him after and he said, "Well I got the feeling that you were mocking me and stuff and mocking my discipline," which is not what I was intending to do. I was just having fun. But then I see his side of the story—OK—I understand now. Once we talked about it he was like "OK," and then it was fine. He listened to me and I listened to him, so there was nothing wrong.

He appreciated that this teacher always asked, "What is going on?" Michael recognized that conversation does not always work out in the student's favour, but regardless, he

appreciated the process. Further speaking to conversations, Jonah stated, “They’ll [educators] sometimes just talk for a minute and say don’t do that again, and sometimes that’s pretty effective.” Kaleb added that a conversation is more effective if those involved begin with questions rather than statements. When an educator questions a student, it brings legitimacy to what the student is going to say rather than starting with an accusatory statement that inflicts the student with guilt rather than hope. He furthered this point by noting that when educators question students, it gives educators time to evaluate the way they are looking at things. He also said that face-to-face conversation eliminates administrators from acting as mediators or final decision makers. Kaleb believed that in a situation where an administrator who is removed from the conflict ends up making the final decision, a student’s voice can be filtered or altered, sometimes unintentionally and sometimes purposefully. He understood that not every scenario suited itself to having the involved parties meet face to face right away, yet Kaleb also believed that conversation by its nature was more likely to bring resolution. He would like to see everyone eventually come together following conflict, allowing the whole process to be more open and thereby genuine.

Not all students believed that offenders deserved to be involved in conversation. Julie—a student who has received no formal discipline—suggested that students being disciplined have lost the right to provide input into a situation. She held that students being disciplined abuse the opportunity to converse, using conversation only as a means to get out of a difficult situation. For the teacher to avoid this scenario, she felt it was necessary for the teacher to discipline by the rules and to not be swayed by a student’s words. If the student does not change as a result of the rules, then Julie suggested, “If the

punishment gets—well not worse—but keeps going, then the student will [eventually] learn.” Jonah, another participant with little formal discipline, initially stated that repetition of discipline combined with increasing the “harshness” of the punishment would change the student. Later when the participant reflected on personal experience, he noted that conversation had been more powerful in the past than punishment had been.

Kaleb, Kelsie, and Michael spoke about students being involved directly with educators in the resolution of situations. Kaleb exclaimed, “It’s both of their conflict—they both should resolve it!” He advocated for involving students in the process, for student input enables everyone involved to better understand the complexity of a situation. Furthermore, involving students keeps the process open and allows everyone to have their questions answered personally. Kaleb said, “You are being disciplined, but you understand the discipline this time—it’s not just something coming out of the blue and you asking, ‘Well what’s this for?’” He believed that many conflicts could be resolved through a quick one-on-one conversation with student input rather than an elaborate disciplinary process that fails to heed the voice of students involved.

Michael said that to not talk is *illogical*. In his judgment, those individuals who know the most about the situation should be the ones solving it. He expressed that “you need to get these two together and figure out why they are clashing” if you want true resolution. If other people need to be brought in to help with the process that is OK, but those directly involved need to be involved in the process. He added that the best-case scenario is one where the conflict can be resolved before those involved are face to face again in the educational environment. Michael noted that when a student observes a teacher making an effort to resolve an issue, then the student sees the process as more just

and values the teacher's actions rather than holding a grudge and bringing the grudge back into the classroom each successive day that the conflict remains unresolved.

### *Justice in Disciplinary Procedures*

For a process to be *just*, all of the participants felt that they needed to know that educators utilized a full and complete process for resolving conflict. Those who had faced significant discipline throughout high school—Kelsie and Kaleb—needed to know that they were seen as legitimate and that their self-worth was maintained throughout the process. Marissa recalled the positive experience of being sent to the office but not being judged by the administrator who met her there. She said, “[The administrator] wasn’t, like, ‘I’m going to talk to you differently because you got sent to the office.’ [The administrator] was still, like, talking with me and being friendly and everything.” This small gesture helped her feel like the process was legitimate.

Kelsie felt that sometimes educators ask the right questions, but she did not believe students’ responses were always truly listened to. She said that teachers who failed to be genuine in their questioning made it difficult for students to respect the process. Kaleb expressed that sometimes educators move forward with a process without investigating or finding all of the appropriate information. He believed that an uninformed response was an unjust response. Kelsie added that educators must decide on how much time is necessary to effectively solve a given scenario. They must avoid dragging issues out, for unresolved conflicts burden those involved in the conflict. Rather, she desired educators to allow adequate time for all those involved to process the issue and then to move forward with the parties to resolve it.



Kelsie considered a standard process for resolving conflict to not be fair to students for it did not consider each individual's case. It served as a quick fix but failed to truly resolve the issue. Michael expressed that coming to a just response was not easy, for each student has different needs, and each scenario is different. He simply stated, "There has to be discretion in every case." Students expressed what they thought would be an effective process, but they also understood that processes differed from teacher to teacher, from issue to issue, and from circumstance to circumstance. The discretionary factors affecting educator's decisions make the execution of discipline—whether punitive or resolutionary—a complex process.

### **Educator Discretion**

Participants revealed a deep understanding of the number of discretionary factors involved in making disciplinary decisions. The following section elaborates on significant areas of discretion as noted by the participants: *power, the choice to take action, individualism in discretion, dead-end processes, policy, and parents.*

#### *Power*

Participants spoke frequently of the power used by educators in a school and how this influenced their discretionary decisions. Participants viewed this power as having positive aspects. For Kelsie, teachers are able to use their power to make the choice to respect students. In addition, teachers also have the power to create a positive classroom environment. Marissa expressed that the best classrooms are those where the teacher creates a balance of being "strict and fun." She found this to be a very comfortable learning environment. Julie explained that an effective classroom is one where teachers use their power to control the class and discipline effectively. Kaleb maintained that

when a teacher uses his power to find fault in his own actions, that it is meaningful for students. Marissa told a story of a teacher who disciplined a student, only to realize that the wrong student had been disciplined. This student thought it was very powerful for the teacher to admit to the mistake and to overcome the guilt and embarrassment by apologizing.

Participants have also felt overcome by the power of an educator's discretion. Five of the 6 participants expressed that students who are regularly frustrated by an educator's power eventually *fail to care* about being disciplined. Students tire of trying to explain their story, become jaded by consequences, may lose respect for the educator who is disciplining, and eventually lose interest in a class or school itself. Kelsie expressed that if one does not care, then it does not matter what disciplinary action is taken, for the student observes all attempts to resolve issues to be meaningless.

Jonah held that students who are regularly disciplined feel trapped by the system. These students feel that educators assume they are guilty and therefore more hastily discipline them. Marissa added that when students feel they are disciplined unfairly, they tend to want to avoid class, for they feel their time is wasted when they go to class and then are quickly removed. She stated, "I was mad that I was in the hall, and I sat out there for, like, half an hour. It was disappointing."

Kelsie pointed out that a teacher's power is only as strong as the things educators are able to control. Educators can control a classroom environment or a student's time during school. If students believe these things to be valuable, then discipline is effective. If students have other things they find valuable, then the school may need to go outside of the things it controls and utilize outside resources, such as parents.

*Choosing to Act*

An educator's discretionary power can lie simply in the decision to act or not to act upon a given scenario. Participants expressed many reasons why an educator may fail to act at any given time. Kelsie recognized the time and effort it takes to follow through with a disciplinary procedure, understanding that teachers are not always able to commit to the process. Michael observed that teachers are very busy and therefore are constantly picking battles and choosing priorities. Teachers must decide what is essential to do throughout the day, and the decision to act upon a given student may not be a high priority at the time. He also thinks that educators may choose to not act on a problem, for it is possible that a given action may create more issues. The potential for a situation to become more of a problem or the potential for ill feelings between the educator and the student may mean that an educator will not respond at all. Michael furthered his thoughts, stating educators can also become frustrated by a student's repeated actions. How an educator may have responded earlier in the week or even earlier in the class can change, depending on many factors. By week's or class' end, the teacher may react more harshly or not at all. Julie pointed out that teachers will sometimes forget about following up with students. This may be unintentional, as it is not a priority and quickly forgotten. It also may be intentional, for educators sometimes feel their original choice to discipline a student may have been unjustified and therefore simply ignore the issue. The educator may also feel that the threat of further action acted as enough of a deterrent for the student.

Participants expressed that the failure of an educator to act can have a negative effect on students and the classroom environment. Michael held that it was always

necessary to address a situation, for when educators address an issue they are upholding expectations. Yet Marissa stated that it can be situational; “I mean, if it is just someone coming in late—I mean, a student’s not being very bad or anything—like I mean, yeah, it’s not really a big deal—so that’s just fine [to not deal with it].” Julie suggested that when an educator is inconsistent in addressing situations or when two different educators treat a similar situation differently, it is difficult for students. Students may speak negatively towards the teacher or the issue, for a double standard is established that creates confusion among the student body. She warned that though educators may feel it is appropriate sometimes to not discipline fearing student backlash, the failure to react creates a hypocritical environment. Students will say, “If they won’t uphold it, why should I obey it?!” or “If I am not going to be disciplined, then I can still do it.” Julie believed that lack of action resulted in greater disorder. Michael thought that students act according to how the teacher executes expectations, stating “they [students] are just acting how they can.” Kelsie said that sometimes students are unaware of what is acceptable and unacceptable, for expectations are not always clear. When expectations are unclear, then frustration can result for both the teacher and the student, often resulting in anger. Marissa noted that teachers are trying to resolve issues with the best interest of the student in mind, but emotions and anger can override an educator’s good intentions.

#### *Individualism in Discretion*

Four of the 6 participants believed educators wanted to act in the best interests of students, but they sometimes failed to respond to students as individuals deserving fair and just treatment. Kaleb observed that many students are treated exactly the same, though the method of resolution may not be fitting for a particular student. Michael

expressed that using different methods to resolve issues was completely legitimate, for he does not believe that everyone should be treated the same way. The use of blanket statements such as “stop talking” to deal with issues was seen by Kelsie as very ineffective. Instead, she believed that taking the time to speak one on one with perpetrators was much more effective and fair for the individual and the rest of the class. Julie supported educators in their efforts to create a quality atmosphere for learning. Despite the differing views of educators, the participant upheld educators in their efforts to use discretion effectively to find balance and control in the school environment.

Though students may favour given ways of dealing with issues, the participants also appreciated that teachers are unique and have preferences for how to deal with things. Teachers who are able to deal with issues on their own without utilizing administration are preferred by Marissa, but she understood that some teachers were more comfortable with utilizing administration to deal with problems. Kaleb finds it difficult to have differing expectations as he moves from class to class:

Some teachers... I know I can have a conversation with people around me and it doesn't bother them [the teacher]—then I got to the next class and have to sit perfectly still and not make a noise or walk around or anything or I'll get kicked out right away. I guess in a way that is frustrating.

Jonah noted that expectations differ depending on the subject itself. An engines class is generally much more relaxed than a math class. One “gets away” with more in this class than they do in a math class. Michael pointed out that this can be most difficult for the teacher who teaches students who have come from the engines class, for they come having learned under a less constrained environment.

Participants posited that educators make discretionary decisions based on the associations the educator has with the student. Kelsie deemed that teachers favour students who have a past of keeping out of trouble. She feels it is hard to start any class with a clean slate, for one's reputation always travels with him/her. This participant appreciated educators who did not judge students but rather developed their own impressions of students. Kaleb and Jonah reiterated this point, stating that students are disciplined more hastily when they have a past of creating problems.

Jonah described the stereotypical model student as "quiet in class—listens to what he [the teacher] is saying—does his work." Through his assessment he noted, "They [model students] probably get away with more—like they can talk more in class but the teacher does not care 'cause he probably thinks they are talking about work and stuff. I do not think they get in trouble as fast," whereas, "he [the teacher] probably still get the person who gets in trouble a lot in trouble, before the other person."

Each of the participants spoke about the role of emotions in discipline, recognizing that the process and the outcome of a disciplinary process are dependent on both the educator's and the student's emotional state. The process is seen to be more effective when teachers can maintain their composure. Both Marissa and Julie conveyed that when an educator sets an expectation, it is much more likely to be listened to when it is said in a friendly but direct way. Participants also observed other factors that contributed to an educator's decision making. Kaleb noted that educators treat students with higher marks differently than students with lower marks. Teachers remove students with lower grades much more hastily than students with higher grades. He also is certain that one's relation to an educator changes how an educator treats a student. Students who

are involved in extracurricular activities that the educator is interested in appear to be treated more favourably than students who are not. Julie recognized that a student's association or past with a given teacher affected how students were treated but hoped that every educator could do their best to be fair.

A strategy educators use to encourage students to maintain order is the use of threats, a generic overarching method of bringing order, rather than focusing on individuals. Jonah shared that threats are a poor way of communicating expectations, for threats often represent changing or new expectations. The use of threats was seen by Marissa as a way for educators to avoid harming relationships with students while enabling education to continue, for educators want to avoid disciplining if they can. Kaleb saw threats as a short-term way of dealing with what was a larger problem. Short-term punitive methods of dealing with issues were seen by participants to be ineffective in the long run.

### *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*

Each participant conveyed that there was a culture in their school of educators removing students from the classroom environment as a means of discipline. They communicated that they understood the reasoning for such a process. For example, Kaleb recognized that teachers sometimes need to bring a sense of control to their classrooms. Marissa supported teachers, stating that they are simply trying to create a more effective classroom environment. Julie felt that students sometimes leave teachers no option but to remove them. Both Kaleb and Michael believed that the key to using the hallway for disciplining was to make sure that there was immediate follow-up, ensuring the problem was resolved as quickly as possible.

Participants noted that discipline was not just for the student being disciplined. Kaleb stated, “It’s probably for the students in the class to focus and get work done.” Removing a student from a class enables the rest of the class to focus and work. Jonah agreed that removing a student is for the interest of the rest of the class, but he added that a student “obviously doesn’t want to learn if he is disrupting the class.” He later recanted when he stated, “sometimes students are disruptive by accident, but they forgot they were actually supposed to be listening—it doesn’t mean they don’t want to learn but they just still disrupt the class.” Julie observed that the decision to remove a student from class was not an easy one, for a teacher must consider many factors including the student’s current academic standing or who else may have been sent out already. She supposed that the interest of the group often outweighs the interest of the individual.

Participants disciplined less were more likely to see removal as effective. Both Marissa and Jonah felt that it was frustrating for one to make up missed class time, specifically for being removed by the teacher. Marissa added that the guilt of being removed was enough of a deterrent. By being sent out of class, the teacher was able to establish limits and expectations, hoping the student changed for the better. Kaleb observed removal did little for the class or the removed student. For Julie, the problem with removal of a student was that it was typically in the best interest of the *teacher*. Removal works as a short-term, *out of sight–out of mind* form of discipline. The participant saw removal as an inefficient use of time for the student. Kaleb observed that for those removed from class frequently, removal from class to the hall was simply an opportunity for being social with others in the hall. The participant simply saw removal to the hall as a discretionary short-term solution, enabling the teacher to avoid utilizing



the office for discipline. The teacher was able to complete the lesson under control and then allowed the student to reenter, yet often there was little follow-up with the student. Though Michael did not see removal to the hall as effective, he expressed the belief that the hallway was a way for a teacher to discipline without making a drawn-out scene in front of the whole class. Nevertheless, without follow-up, whether removed to the hall or the office, Michael saw removal as a dead-end process.

Another form of removal participants referred to was suspension. Jonah, a participant never suspended, upheld suspensions as an effective way to discipline students. He deduced that suspensions are effective, for his peers who have been suspended have never been resuspended. Kaleb, a participant who has been suspended, viewed suspensions as necessary for calming students down through removing them from intense situations. Otherwise, he considered suspensions to be ineffective.

Only participants who had been suspended deemed suspensions as a negative process. Kaleb described his suspension as fun; "I just went to another school and hung out with friends." He felt that a simple conversation could have brought resolution, rather than using a suspension. Kelsie was adamant that suspensions were employed by school administration only to end issues quickly. When suspended, she was very nonchalant towards her punishment and used the time away from school to sleep.

Participants communicated that the key element to determining the effectiveness of a resolution was to examine whether or not students *repeated* similar offenses. Jonah expressed that the lack of discipline, whether punitive or for resolution, was a trigger for students to repeat their offenses. Kaleb and Jonah pointed out that educators need to examine their own habitual steps for disciplining, for if the disciplinary process does not

have long-term effects and fails to change the student, its value as an effective procedure should be questioned.

### *Policy*

Participants recognized school policy as an external factor that influenced the discretionary decisions of educators. Julie upheld policy, stating that policies “are put in place for your own [students’] good”. She added that it was the responsibility of students to uphold policies, for to abide by policy is in the best interests of students. Julie finalized her thoughts by stating policies are most effective when one follows the policy because of the intent of the policy and not simply for the sake of following a rule.

Marissa upheld the intent of the policies at her school but believed the lack of discretion built into school policy made believing fully in policies difficult. The participant spoke to the new dress code policy at the school: “Well it’s good because we don’t have everyone running around with rips and low-cut shirts and everything. What isn’t good is that they are so strict about it.” Marissa found the inflexibility of the policy difficult, for clothing that seemed suitable and upheld the spirit of the dress code—dressing for an educational environment—was often not allowed to be worn. She defended the intent of the policy but found the policy fell short in the procedures used to uphold it.

Julie expressed that some educators do not follow through with policy—such as enforcing dress code—for they do not see certain policies as legitimate. The discretionary choice is made not to enforce them. She also felt that upholding some policies was too much of a hassle, so it became easier to ignore them. Finally, she shared that following through with policy that was controversial was difficult, for educators feared that

enforcing policy would affect their relationships with students. Marissa added that the failure by administration to follow through with a policy as written meant that teachers often did not initiate the process if they knew it was not going to be completed at the administrative level.

Participants expressed frustration with the nature of policy, for it is in an educator's discretion as to when to enforce or not enforce a policy. Kaleb spoke about a policy that prevents junior students from leaving property, stating that the policy was rarely upheld. Yet educators enforced it when they wished because the policy still stands. Kaleb and Kelsie discussed the policy that allows students to be disciplined when they are in the vicinity of a fight. Though the participants understood the policy was meant to deter students from making poor choices and being in the region of altercations, the students were frustrated that the school *might* discipline someone who was not involved in the act itself due to the discretion embedded in the policy. Both participants added that it was even more frustrating that policy dictated all students receive the same punishment. Though policy is meant to eliminate discretion, Kaleb felt that the decision to act or not to act on a policy enabled the school to act outside of the interests of the student, acting in the interests of others students, teachers, parents, or even neighbours of the school. The ability to "fall back on policy" was seen by Kaleb and Kelsie as negative, for educators are able to simply say, "This is what the policy says." In this scenario students have no power to respond.

Kelsie pointed out that an educator is also bound by policy, which can be to an educator's *disadvantage*. Though one may want to discipline students in their best interest, the student said, "as a teacher you are expected to have a situation dealt with in a

certain way—you can't just go and do whatever you want—you have a job to uphold.” As an example she suggested that an educator might like to take away a student's cell phone for a week but does not have the power to do that.

Kaleb understood that policy potentially makes a disciplinary process more efficient but not necessarily more fair. The participant stated:

I think that in a way it [policy] makes it a lot easier because they can quickly fly through things like “you're suspended 'cause you went against our policy,” whereas the other way they would have to evaluate each and every thing. But I think the other way would come out with a more fair and equal overall outcome.

Kaleb thought the ability to modify policies so they acted as guidelines and not laws would enable educators to respond according to the person and the circumstances and not the policy itself. He sensed that this would work towards preventing patterned discipline that results in repeated offenses.

Kaleb wanted the school to be able to examine policies. When policies are not upheld, or when due to policy students are given a punishment perhaps not deserved, then educators need to question if the policies are achieving the outcome which they are intended to achieve. He saw some policies, such as those for skipping class, to be very effective, for many students are deterred by detentions. The participant pointed specifically to the policy of junior students leaving school property during lunch. He viewed the inconsistency of enforcement of the policy by educators combined with the rights of high school students to leave property during noon hour as reasons for questioning current practice.

## *Parents*

Participants spoke of the influence of parents and guardians in regards to discretionary decisions. Kaleb expressed that under certain circumstances, educators utilize parents to solve conflict before attempting to solve the conflict directly with the student. He desired that the people directly involved in the conflict come together before parents are utilized. Furthermore, the participant expressed that some parents are very influential and pressure educators to make decisions that they might not make without the pressure. Marissa also referred to the power of parental relations in a school. She stated, “parents on committees—I think they are, like, held higher than other parents.” The result was that educators were influenced in their discretionary choices as to how to respond to given students according to the power of parents.

Jonah explained that parents hold a significant amount of leverage when it comes to discipline: “I think parents can make you feel pretty bad about stuff, and then you’ll stop doing it or they’ll make you stop doing it.” He also suggested that parents are a final resort for educators in terms of ceasing inappropriate action. If parents are unable to control their child, then a school holds little hope for resolution. Kelsie viewed parents as having power because they control things that a school cannot, like phone privileges or curfews. She added that students will fall in line because they do not want to face the cyclical reaction of causing trouble at school and then facing discontented parents at home. Kelsie furthered her thought when she said that sometimes students leave educators no choice but to call parents for help. Kaleb pointed out that using parents is not always a successful endeavour for educators. Some parents are very supportive of the school, while others are supportive of students and their actions. In some instances,

two parents in a given family react in different ways. Kelsie supplemented this idea stating that the support a school expects from a student's home is not always present.

Though some participants viewed parents as a negative influence in disciplinary processes, other participants observed that parents can have a positive impact on the decisions students make. Marissa felt that expectations from parents to succeed and to respect educators influenced her discretionary choices. She desired to please both of her parents, and when disciplined her first reaction was, "Oh, I have to tell my parents!" The desire to uphold her parents' wishes was enough motivation to change her inappropriate behaviour. Nevertheless, she expressed that students' parents have varying standards. These standards influence the discretionary choices of educators and students in a school when responding to potential disciplinary situations.

### **Student Discretion**

The participants articulated that students also have discretionary power and are able to make decisions in relation to educators and their peers. Jonah confessed that students choose whether or not to respond to educators in regards to discipline. A student's affirmative response to disciplinary processes is integral if students are to change. Marissa upheld that educators can do everything in their power to help students, but if students do not choose to respond to their efforts, then the educator's efforts are in vain.

Michael observed that students choose to utilize their power where they can. He has seen students deliberately disobeying the school dress code because they were against the school policy. He said that when educators enforced the policy, students would "bad-talk the teacher behind their back to their friends." If educators failed to follow through

with adequately addressing the situation or were inconsistent in resolving issues, then students continued to disobey policy, attempting to gain power wherever it could be grasped. Marissa articulated that when students are not given a voice, students resort to other ways of expressing their frustration, such as back-talking to educators.

Participants were unanimous in expressing that students always act according to the expectations and limitations set out by educators. Kaleb observed students taking advantage of gaps in attendance procedures. Furthermore he stated that his peers were well aware of which educators failed to follow up with detentions. Attempting to get out of detentions, Kelsie has used the excuse "I forgot my note" several times, hoping the educator would eventually fail to follow up. Julie has observed that students divert issues, placing blame elsewhere. When students recognized that educators accepted certain excuses, then students continued to use these excuses, using the power of their discretion to force educators to make difficult decisions.

Participants conveyed that students constantly put educators into positions where they must make complicated discretionary decisions. Jonah said that students use excuses to rationalize their actions and attempt to talk their way out of situations. Kelsie stated that students utilize tactics such as crying, lying, fake notes, using excuses that can not be proven, or claiming they were helping others in order to avoid being disciplined. Michael and Julie voiced that students sometimes fail to report to the office when asked to go there with the hope that educators do not follow up. Since the punishment does not differ significantly whether they go to the office or are caught for not reporting to the office, they said it is worth it for students to not report at all with the hope of escaping discipline. Michael proposed that because every excuse and situation is different,

educators can become indifferent towards excuses, choosing to not act rather than make a poor decision in relation to the reason or excuse. Julie stated that educators are put in an awkward position when they must consider whether or not a student's reason or excuse is valid, for an educator must decide whether or not a student is telling the truth. The educator is forced to make a discretionary decision and to live with it. Kaleb added that students are aware that without evidence or proof—in a situation such as consuming alcohol at school—that often educators cannot make a decision at all.

When students force educators to make difficult discretionary decisions, the *student-educator relationship* can be strained. Jonah considered taking advantage of educators to be an abuse of the student-educator relationship. Kelsie expressed that most of the time the benefits of a short-term lie outweigh the downside of the potential long-term consequences of repeatedly lying to an educator. Yet, she is unable to lie to educators who respect her. Kelsie was passionate about the fact that educators who are genuine deserve to be treated genuinely. Furthermore, she said there is nothing worse than lying to someone who has repeatedly trusted you and respected you. Kelsie values the strength of a positive student-educator relationship.

### **Student-Educator Relationship**

Participants spoke to the qualities and importance of the *student-educator relationship*. Jonah and Julie, students who are seldom disciplined, described some educators as being more like *friends*. Julie illustrated this relationship as finding a balance between friendliness and drawing the line of still being a teacher. Expanding upon the idea of educators as friends, Jonah depicted these educators as individuals who open their lives to students. Participants said that educators are not friends in the



traditional sense of the word but that they were able to participate in meaningful conversation with these educators both in and out of the classroom. They felt they could ask these educators a question about their lives outside of school, which made students feel comfortable with the educators and the school environment.

Participants described the characteristics of quality teachers. Kelsie desired teachers who genuinely cared for students and found good in students. She appreciated teachers who were honest with students and told the truth. Kelsie believed in the idea that trust created a reciprocal relationship when she stated, “My teachers I am honest with, they are honest with me too.” She wants to be loved by educators and not to be judged, hoping that educators would value every student, regardless of how students were acting. Kelsie shared that students can tell the difference between educators who react out of duty and educators who act positively towards students because they truly care.

Participants stated that it takes little to harm the student-educator relationship. Kelsie said that if educators fail to care about students and fail to deal with their issues justly, then students fail to care. In regards to teachers, she articulated that when teachers make their classes all about earning a credit and fail to care and recognize the worth of students, then the teacher is not fulfilling his/her duty. She deemed that it is very telling when a teacher takes time out of class to care for a student, as it shows that the teacher values the individual more than the class. Kaleb expanded on the same idea, stating that when teachers simply remove students from the classroom without following up, it can have a negative impact on the relationship between teachers and students. Julie again spoke to the complexity of the balancing act of building relationships and being professional as a teacher. She felt that it is difficult to discipline those students with

whom there is a relation, for there is fear of harming the relation. The school dress code policy is one place the student has observed this, noting that because some students are so against the policy that students respond sourly when educators repeatedly work to uphold the policy. Finding the boundaries and limitations of the student-educator relationship is a constant process of balancing discretionary decisions.

Marissa expressed that for educators some aspects of building student-educator relationships are intentional while others are simply natural. The participant has observed educators who are constantly working to build relations through actions and inactions. An educator may intentionally ask questions to get to know a student but also may choose not to discipline a student in order to further the relation. She also thought that every teacher wanted to like students and wanted to be liked by students. Nevertheless, the participant perceived that building student-educator relations was natural for some educators and difficult for others, for some teachers have better relational skills. Jonah stated, “Some teachers, like, talk to a lot of people in the hallway—some teachers can only talk to some people, and that’s OK.” In addition, Marissa said that some students and educators just “click,” an element that can not be controlled. She felt that educators should be aware of these relations, mostly to consider those students who are not as connected to them so they do not feel ignored.

Participants cherished those educators that talked to them. Jonah told a story of a teacher who brought hope and greater academic success through a small but meaningful conversation:

Well a teacher asked me to stay after class was over and said, “can you stay here for a second”—so I stayed after, and he kind of asked me what my

goals were in the class and, like, that I shouldn't be talking and stuff like that—so I stopped talking—it was a lot easier to concentrate in that class after that.

Kaleb was confident that conversation helped to develop relationships. The relationships positively influenced many aspects of a student's education. When a student has a relationship with a teacher or administrator, then that student has a greater desire to improve class work and to uphold a positive atmosphere in the presence of that educator. In closing his interview, Jonah's final thought was, "if an educator wants to be effective, they have to converse with students."

Michael believed if one wanted to discipline in a student's best interest, then one needed to have a relationship with the one they were disciplining. Failing to know an individual and their background meant that one could not make a decision that reflected a student's needs. When one is disciplined without a relationship in place, then the tendency is to fall back on policy rather than consider the individual. He upheld the idea that the teacher and student must come together to resolve a situation, for they know each other best. When the student-educator relationship is strong, then this conference can happen naturally.

Julie expressed that if educators feel like they are going to control how students act they will fall short, for it is impossible to *control* all students in a school. Rather than control, participants spoke of the idea of *respect*. In all aspects of the interview—speaking to the definition, effective processes, teacher discretion, student discretion, and the student-educator relationship—students spoke to the underlying theme of respect as the quality that needs to drive discretionary decisions. Michael stated that without respect

from both the student and the educator, the likelihood of resolving conflict is minimal. He added that not only does respect increase the likelihood of resolution, but it also brings ease to the overall process. Kelsie was certain that respect needs to be earned, for it is natural to respect those who respect you and likewise natural to not respect those who do not respect you. As a result she articulated that both educators and students needed to be cautious as soon as they entered the school environment, for the first interaction one has with another person potentially influences the long-term relationship.

The effects of respect go far beyond disciplinary resolution. Michael observed that respect increases student learning. In Jonah's experience, conversation and respect helped students recognize that teachers care and want students to succeed, ultimately enhancing a student's education. Though conversation does not always work, the participant urged that this was a great place to start to ensure educators respected everyone. Making decisions in an air of respect is beneficial to all students. Marissa pronounced that when teachers initiate respect, it influences the student long term, for "with their believing, we become like their believing."

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter commences with a framework for understanding discretion and how discretion is influenced by one's vision. The chapter continues examining participants' views of discipline and punishment and the influence of discretion in disciplinary decisions. Next, the chapter inspects processes that the respondents believe will uphold students and their interests. Using the work of Wachtel (1999b) and Amstutz and Mullet (2005) restorative justice is examined as a viable vision for channeling discretion as it relates to discipline in schools, correlating high school student views and a restorative perspective. The discussion continues by examining the need for positive student-educator relations. The chapter concludes by looking at the implications of this study.

### **Framing Discretion**

When one takes a picture, many variables can be considered: What will be the subject of the picture? Where will I place the subject in the frame? or Do I need to zoom in or away from the subject? Those who are skilled in the art of photography may consider several other variables: What will I set the aperture at? What should the speed be? What lens do I need? or Do I need a filter? The final photograph is dependent upon the original vision of the photographer. If the purpose is to quickly snap a photograph to remember the moment, then the photographer simply "points and clicks." If being artistic is the purpose of the image, then the photographer considers relevant variables to produce the picture in the photographer's mind. The variables change day to day and hour by hour. Standing in the same place a day later requires considering new variables.

Taking a photograph is a "snapshot"—so to speak—of the *decision-making process*. The variables: zoom, light, subject, filters, and so on represent *discretion*. The variables

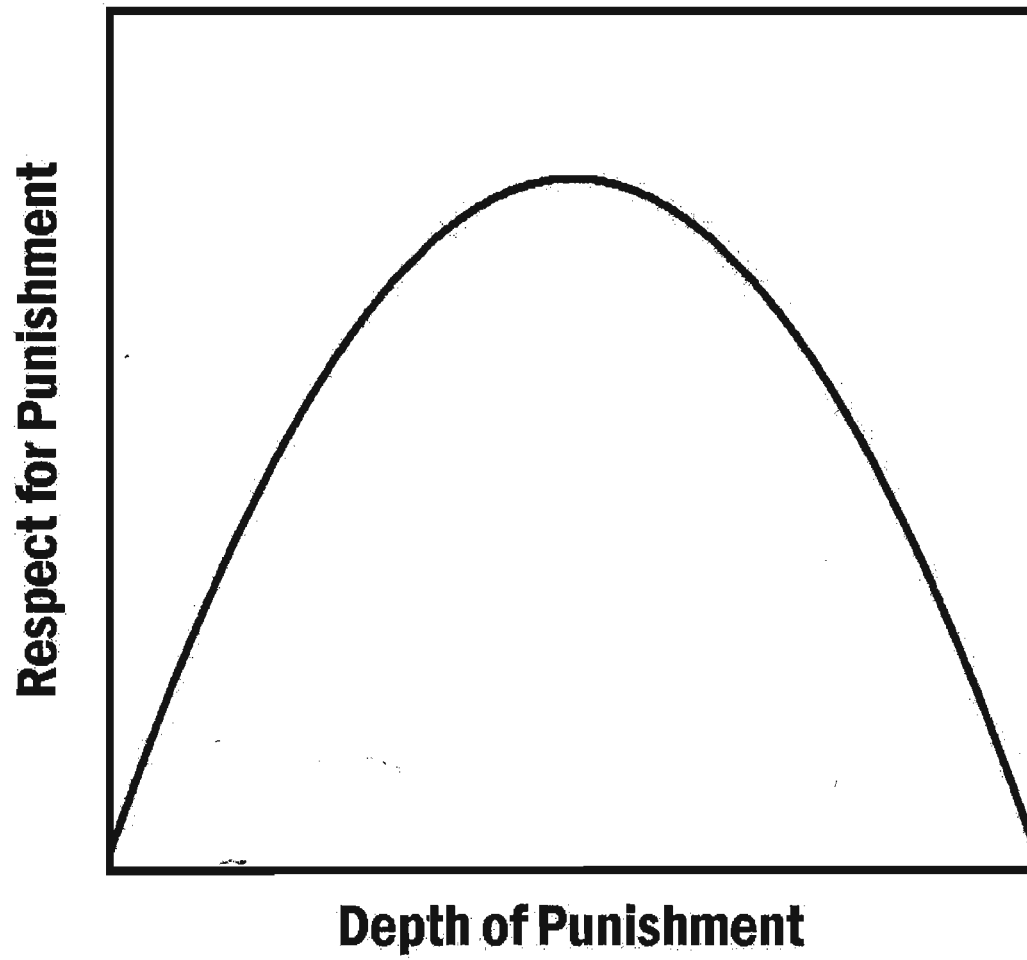
are numerous, some are more relevant than others, and their consideration has an impact on the final picture. After weighing the variables, the image is produced. In photography, it is the final picture. In decision making, it is the *decision*, a final representation of the discretionary variables employed during the process. Just as in photography, the final decision of a decision maker reflects the goal of the decision. Lacking a goal, one may resort to “point and shoot” decisions. These decisions are efficient and sufficient for the moment, though they often lack vision. Participants in this study said that educators are not consistent in carrying out a vision in their discretionary disciplinary decisions. They believe that an educator’s intent is to uphold the best interests of everybody in a school community, but in practice discretion enables educators to sidestep decisions that advocate for students.

### **Punitive Discipline**

Participants said it seems that in order to discipline students in their school, punishment needs to be used. Wachtel (1999b) observes punishment to be the norm when it comes to responding to misbehaviour in our schools. Educators may intend disciplinary procedures to serve the best interests of students, but the participants say otherwise. When they hear the word *discipline*, their immediate association is *punishment*. Educators need to consider that student perceptions represent the reality of the atmosphere in which discipline takes place. Hudson (2006) notes that the word discipline comes from the Latin word *disculpus*, meaning “to teach.” Yet disciplinary procedures which educators exercise to teach and transform students do not always achieve the intended goal.

Wachtel (1999b) describes punishment as passive, an act requiring little to no participation on the part of students. He adds that when it comes to decision making, punitive disciplinary procedures take power away from students, for they hold no investment in the process. Respondents in this study said that the main motivation for serving punitive punishments is to avoid serving additional punitive punishments. Although some educators believe through punitive measures they have served students' interests, this study suggests that in actuality they have taught students to jump through hoops to deal with conflict. Furthermore, the underlying and root causes of the issues or conflicts remain buried. One participant expressed, "I'll never do it [go to a detention] to learn something or to do the right thing—I'll just do it to get out of trouble." Another respondent suggested that when punitive measures are used, students tuck the conflict away, but there is no resolution for the conflict continues to linger.

In addition to failing to address the underlying causes of disciplinary scenarios, participants articulated that punitive responses are seldom respected by high school students (see Figure 1). They noted that they seek fairness and meaning in disciplinary procedures. The participants believe that minimal punitive responses by educators that fail to address issues are not respected by students, who seek proactive and just scenarios. Deep punitive responses were disrespected by participants, for they say that students fail to find meaning in harsh punitive measures, believing that harshness can not be equated with effectiveness. Participants stated that if punitive discipline is used, it needs to be harsh enough to encourage the student not to repeat the action but not so harsh as to harm the relationship with the educator executing the discipline.

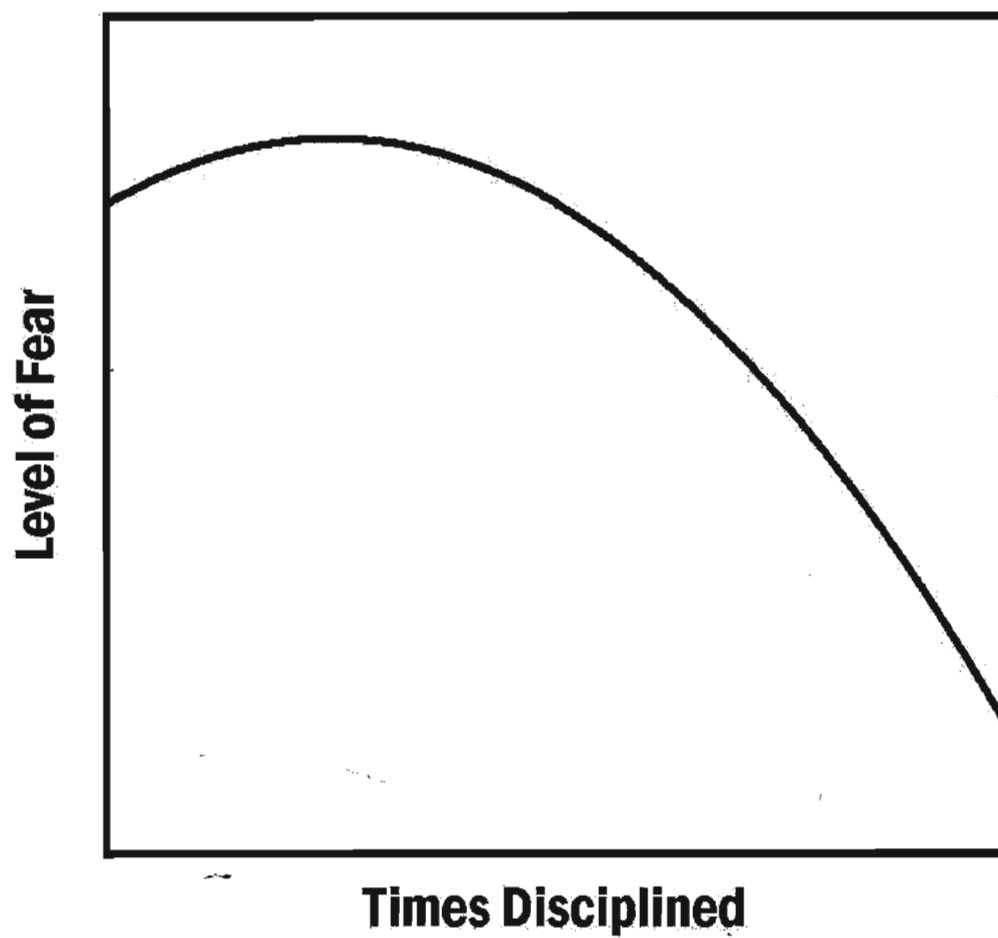


*Figure 1.* Student's respect for punitive discipline.



Consistent with the findings of Larson and Karpas (cited in Thorson, 2006, p. 6) who describe detentions as serving to “annoy the annoyer,” participants said that punitive discipline works by frustrating students and deterring them through repetitive consequences. The respondents expressed mixed reaction in regards to the effectiveness of punitive measures for disciplining students. Participants who had faced little discipline believe the theory of frustrating students to be *effective*, for if the punitive action serves to stop the problem, then the practice of utilizing punitive responses should be continued. They fear facing punitive measures and, as a result, believe that fear deters students from misbehaving. Participants who had faced significant formal discipline at school balked at the effectiveness of repeated punitive discipline, for they were resigned to frustration and conveyed that long-term aggravation is not an effective way to change one’s behaviour. Having experienced the results of repeated short-term punitive measures, the participants expressed that there are few benefits in terms of long-term effectiveness (see Figure 2). The more students are disciplined punitively, the less likely they are to respond; for they become immune to the fear associated with punitive discipline, as the process becomes repetitive and stagnant.

Amstutz and Mullet (2005) write that punitive discipline fails to create safer schools. Similarly, Wachtel (1999b) observed that students caught in a cycle of punitive discipline are angry, resent authority, and feel silenced. Five of the 6 participants said that students stuck in a cycle of rote enforcement simply resign to being disciplined and tend to rebel rather than change for the better. When stuck in a repetitive punitive cycle, participants say they respond less and less to disciplinary measures and care less and less about education: curriculum, educators, and school culture. Participants observed that



*Figure 2.* Student's fear of punitive discipline.

through repetitive punitive measures schools potentially risk losing students completely, removing a student's right to education. Amstutz and Mullet (2005) argue that we need to move beyond discipline as punishment, for the daily decision making of educators provides opportunities for upholding students using methods besides punitive measures.

### **Student Perceptions of Discretion**

One participant expressed that educators must always act in a *student's best interests* (Stefkovich & O'Brien, 2004) when disciplining, for they are educators! Yet, participants regularly presented examples where this wasn't the case. Discretionary factors that are relevant to one individual may not be relevant to another. These factors differ from educator to educator and from student to student and thereby influence decisions. The high school participants communicated that there are many discretionary factors that can sway the decisions of an educator as they seek to uphold the interests of students. These factors include:

1. *Power*: By nature of their professional position and as adults, educators possess significant discretionary power. Participants expressed that how an educator utilizes their power dictates the power that students possess. Educators have the ability to empower or disempower students. Those regularly disempowered have a significantly decreased desire to be involved with the educational system.
2. *To act or not to act*: The discretionary factors contributing to action or inaction were seen by participants as important to recognize when considering student best interest. They stated that educators' priorities, time management, effort, or the potential for harming a positive student-educator relationship all are

considerations when an educator makes a decision. The day of the week or how much time has passed in class also contribute to how an educator may respond to misbehaviour. When the participants see inconsistency from scenario to scenario or from educator to educator, they find it difficult, for it expresses that expectations and best interests differ from student to student.

3. *Recognizing the individual*: Though the participants want expectations and best interests to be clear, they also want educators to use their discretionary power to recognize individuals and their needs rather than using overarching blanket statements and punishments to deal with issues. They stated that educators are quicker to discipline students who have a past of misbehaving. Furthermore, they noted that educators tend to leave students alone who have outstanding academic records. Students did not see these discretionary decisions as being in the best interest of students, for an educator's discretionary actions need to be based on justice, not a student's past, attributes, and accomplishments.

4. *Policy*: Participants viewed policy to be both positive and negative, depending on how educators use their discretionary power in relation to policy.

Participants acknowledge that policy leaves itself open to both upholding discretionary power and negating it. An educator can use discretionary power to choose to apply a policy or not. Yet an educator can fall back on policy, allowing the policy to dictate the process rather than the educator. Participants believe that policies often focus on efficiency rather than effectiveness. It is dependent on how the educator chooses to apply the policy.

5. *Parents*: The high school participants recognized that parents are a significant discretionary factor in the decision-making process of educators. Educators use parents to positively influence students in terms of their education and their well-being, but participants also say that educators sometimes resort to utilizing parental influence without first empowering students to change their own behaviour. Furthermore, the influence of parents—their role in the community or their expectations—influences the discretionary decisions of educators in relation to students.

Participants say that educators often seek order before students' interests. For example, they said that it is easier to remove a student from class than to consider how his/her needs can be met. They held that an intentional and well thought out process for disciplinary scenarios could guide the discretionary power educators possess, increasing the likelihood of meeting students' needs.

### **A Just Process for Discipline**

In describing an effective and just process for discipline, participants spoke to a process that makes discretion public and justifies decisions. Even in a public setting like a school, the discretionary decisions of educators can be very private, behind the doors of classrooms, administrative offices, or simply hidden in the minds of educators.

Participants said that students often feel powerless and eventually fail to respond to discipline, for educators fail to heed their voices. Furthermore, they said that students yearn for a process that moves away from punitive measures and focuses on resolving issues. They described the process as follows:

1. *Involve the student:* The respondents expressed a desire for involvement in the process. They long to be involved in the process from the beginning so they become stakeholders in the established environment, culture, and decision-making process. Participants also want educators to listen to them and to converse with them, taking into account their stories and their perspective. Participants expressed that they want their stories to be clear, and they want to understand the discretion and rationale educators employ when making decisions. They feel many conflicts could be resolved through simple conversing rather than employing drawn-out punitive procedures.
2. *Deal with the issue as well as the student:* In the desire to maintain order, participants observed that educators often tend to remove students from class. Nevertheless, educators often failed to speak to the student before they returned later in class or the next day. The inappropriate behaviour is dealt with, but the student and his/her needs are not addressed. Participants say that the failure to speak to the student and resolve the issue means that the conflict continues to simmer. This upholds Pomeroy's (1999) study, where students conveyed that when they are not listened to, then they feel they and their opinions are not valued. Participants said they care about issues and resolving them rather than punishing them because of their action. They suggested that utilizing discretion to focus on the students and the reasons behind inappropriate behaviour serves to work towards problem resolution.
3. *Give students a vision:* Participants desire educators to make expectations clear from the beginning. Clear expectations serve to establish a preventative setting

rather than a reactionary one, which results in an atmosphere of resolution rather than punishment. Expectations also work to guide the discretion and power of both students and educators, as both are working towards a common goal.

Without a vision for students, educators can resort to short-term measures that fail to uphold students. Yet evaluating a disciplinary vision is not easy. Some aspects of education are easy to measure and quantify. Educators can have a vision for students achieving 100% in their classes. Coaches can establish goals for winning a championship. Discipline is much less quantifiable and as a result is more difficult to establish goals for. Furthermore it is difficult to measure our progress in meeting students' needs. Nevertheless, educators need to identify what they really want students to learn from discipline.

### **Restorative Justice as a Vision for Discipline**

*Restorative justice*, also referred to as *restorative practices* (Wachtel, 1999b) or *restorative discipline* (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005), serves as a philosophy for resolving conflict and misbehaviour in both the criminal justice system and in education. Amstutz and Mullet formally define restorative justice as “a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible” (p. 15). The focus of restorative justice—healing and making things right—can serve as a vision for disciplinary procedures in high schools in working towards addressing and upholding students' interests.

As a philosophy of discipline and school culture, restorative justice overlaps the processes described by high school students for effective disciplinary procedures. The restorative philosophy serves to solidify a vision for discipline, aiming to serve the best interests of students and all stakeholders by addressing the needs of not only students but all stakeholders in a conflict. Restorative justice gives a voice to all involved, encouraging conversation and seeking to resolve rather than punish. Finally, restorative justice is congruent with student views in that it aims to address harms and resolve conflict rather than ignoring the issues. Nevertheless, as a philosophy of discipline, restorative justice goes beyond the vision students expressed for disciplinary procedures.

Amstutz and Mullet (2005) describe a *continuum of discipline* that evaluates the discretionary methods used in regards to discipline. The continuum moves from *punishment*, to *consequences*, to *solutions*, to *restoration*. In a punishment approach, consequences fail to connect to the misbehavior. In a consequences approach, an “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” approach is employed, ensuring the punitive measure applied fits the infraction. “A solutions approach sees misbehavior as a problem to be solved” (p. 21). The goal in a solutions approach is to determine the reason for the misbehaviour and then seek to rectify the behaviour by encouraging a more positive alternative behaviour. The high school participants articulated a process and a vision that significantly reflects a *solutions approach*. They desired conflict to be resolved, as they believe “discipline” can be achieved without punitive measures, encouraging conversation as a means to resolution. Participants thought that through conversation, educators are more likely to reach students, and students are more likely to respond and change their behaviour when approached with respect. Furthermore participants felt that



through a solutions approach justice is served. Yet a solutions approach has its drawbacks. In this approach, educators are the initiators. They are responsible for discipline and students depend on them to instigate disciplinary proceedings. Furthermore, in a solutions approach students are self-serving. Participants expressed that they are looking to resolve conflict for themselves. Rarely did they consider the viewpoint of others involved in conflict and how this shaped their own behaviour. A restorative approach aims not only to have students involved in the process but to enable students to be initiators of the process. Through dialogue—a process the participants affirmed—restorative justice aims to help educators and students recognize the rationale and background behind misbehaviour (Amstutz and Mullet).

Restorative justice is an empathetic form of resolving conflict. Just as students desire educators to be empathetic towards them, restorative justice encourages students to be empathetic towards others. Educators using restorative justice processes aspire to have students become leaders in and out of their school community by confronting others about inappropriate behavior and seeking to restore those who have been harmed (Wachtel, 1999b).

Amstutz and Mullet (2005) believe it is necessary to individualize disciplinary procedures to meet the needs of students. Participants spoke of a need for processes that consider the needs of each individual, including past experiences, nature of the conflict, and factors that may have resulted in the conflict or misbehaviour. Amstutz and Mullet propose six goals for restorative discipline, restorative justice for schools that aims to consider the needs of all individuals who have a vested interest in a given disciplinary scenario.

1. *Understand harm—empathy for the harmed and the harmer:* Participants expressed that sometimes educators can be the harmer. Yet this is a situation that is rarely addressed. Participants desire a process that recognizes when students are the harmer, when students are harmed, and how this can be dealt with justly.
2. *Listen and respond to needs of harmed and harmer:* Participants who have faced little in the way of discipline express the need to be heard when they have been harmed. A restorative approach is deliberate in considering everyone who has a stake in a given situation.
3. *Encourage accountability and responsibility through personal reflection and a collaborative planning process:* Participants want to be a part of the decision-making process. Enabling students to not only share but to plan the process of restoration and to take accountability for the decisions made works towards moulding students as leaders. They become stakeholders in the vision for serving the best interests not only of the students but the community as a whole.
4. *Reintegrate harmer as a valuable contributing member of community:* Participants spoke to the fact that following a disciplinary situation, students are often not spoken to and the conflict lingers on amongst both the educators and the students. Participants regularly expressed the need to be uplifted as students, for they want to be cared for by educators. Ensuring that students who have harmed are supported and respected is essential in a school community.

5. *Create a caring climate and a supporting community:* The participants said that it is very evident when educators care about students and for students. They say that when educators value them as individuals, it changes students' attitudes towards learning, often resulting in better marks and increased interest in the material being taught.

6. *Change system when it contributes to the harm:* Participants expressed that policy does not always leave room for the individual. They desire changes to policy and processes that enable educators to utilize discretion, thereby allowing educators to make decisions that are in the best interests of students.

Working from a proactive plan of action rather than a reactive response of punishment enables the vision for upholding students' best interests to come through. A vision for restorative justice for a high school is student centred. If one's desire is to work with high school students to change behaviours, then it is necessary to invest in their lives: converse with them, confront them about their behavior, and lead them beyond where they are. This means regularly working closely with students (Wachtel, 1999b).

Restorative justice is about living in community (Amstutz & Mullet). The philosophy revolves around relations, whereas punitive discipline works around regulations. Yet relationships are an investment themselves, for building positive relationships takes time and energy. This requires educators to make a commitment to investing relationally with students.

### *Student-Educator Relations*

Amstutz and Mullet (2005) state relationships are central to building community for a restorative model of discipline to be successful. They first believe that relationships

are strengthened through a *caring climate*. The respondents said that it is obvious when educators care for students. For example, one participant stated that it is clear when educators care more about students earning credits than they do about building community through relationships. Participants described what it meant to have a positive relationship with an educator. They said these educators make the effort to participate in meaningful conversation with students. Through their actions these educators make it known that they care about students both in and beyond the school environment. The respondents value educators who are honest with them and added that students respond with caring and honesty when they are cared for by educators.

Amstutz and Mullet (2005) believe that to develop community it is necessary to value *everyone in the community*. The participants said that this requires looking beyond student behaviour and focusing on the worth of the individual. They say this can be achieved through maintaining individual accountability with each student through: challenging students to be successful, continually valuing students as individuals, and personally and constantly following up with students after challenging them. Amstutz and Mullet propose concepts necessary for building community and a restorative culture which go beyond those ideas suggested by students. They believe students need *to be involved in naming and developing values and principles central to a school*. Again, this concept instills students as initiators. In the current disciplinary paradigm, students view themselves as reactors, responding to behaviour rather than being empowered to influence school culture. In a restorative model, the paradigm for how educators relate to students must also change. Student-educator relationships are often *you versus me*

relationships. The paradigm needs to be transferred to you working *with* me relationships.

### *Wachtel's Window of Social Discipline*

Wachtel (1999b) proposes that educators must move beyond a limited punitive paradigm to a paradigm that considers the relational component of the student-educator relationship. The *social discipline window* considers two integral aspects of this association: *control* and *support* (See Figure 3 of Wachtel, 1999a). Control refers to the degree of discipline or limitations an educator places on a student's misbehaviour. Support refers to the encouragement and nurturing an educator impresses upon a student. In the social discipline window, a *neglectful* approach implies educators do NOT control students or support them. In a *punitive* approach, educators provide a high level of control but little support. In this window, educators do discipline TO students. This is the window which students most often associate with discipline. Wachtel adds that working in this window often results in alienation of students. In a *permissive* approach, students receive a high level of support, but the control is limited. In this instance, educators are conducting discipline FOR students. Though nurturing exists, failing to enable students to see where their behaviours affect others results in the student perhaps feeling positive, yet fails to change their responses to similar behaviours in the future. Wachtel proposes that educators and students need to move to a restorative paradigm, where educators carry out a high degree of support and a high degree of control. In this window, educators work WITH students, confronting behaviour while valuing the individual. This window upholds the desire of students, for students desire educators to act on misbehaviour and to value and care for students. In fact, participants said that

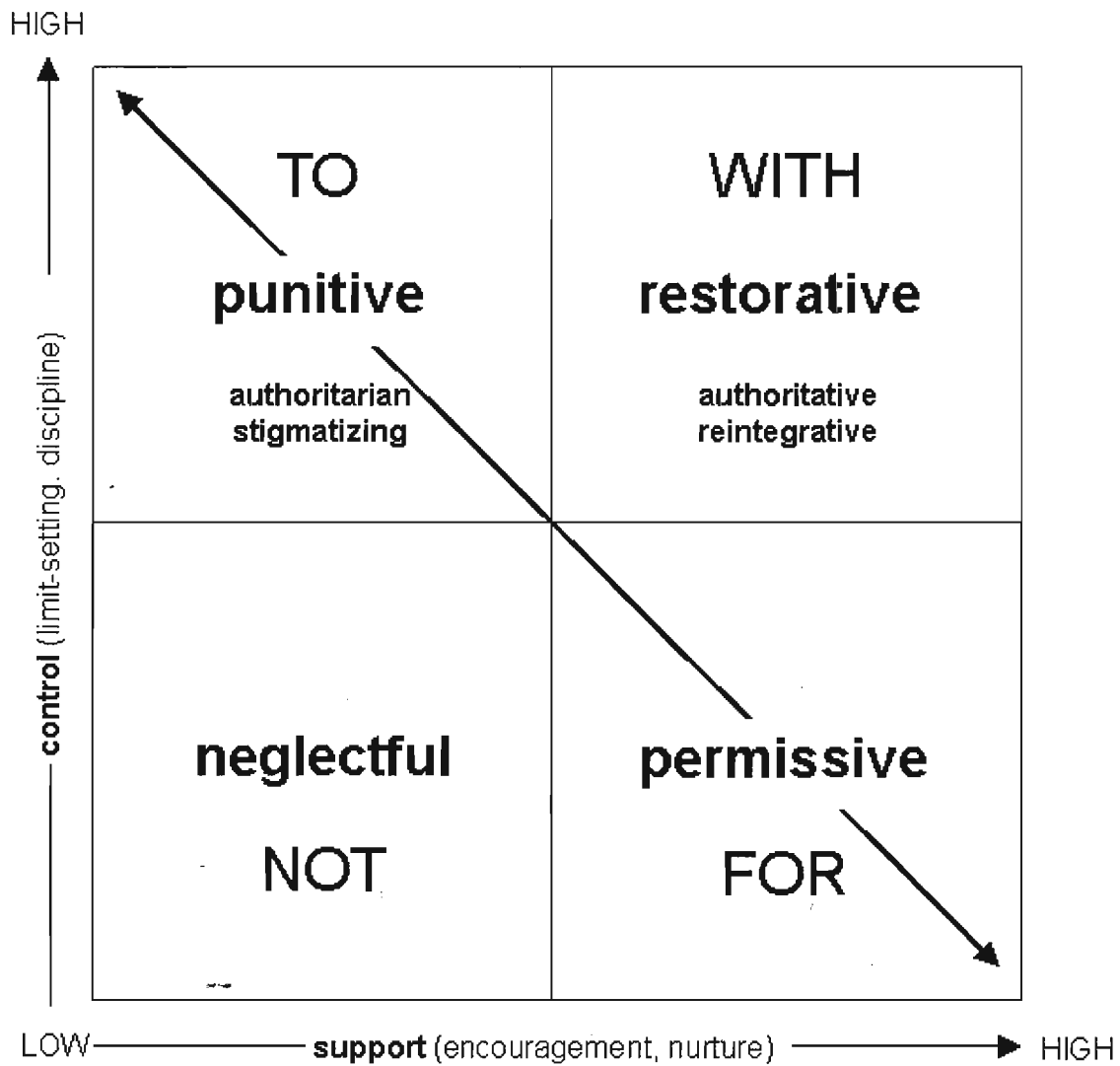


Figure 3. Wachtel's social discipline window.

*Note.* From "Restorative Justice in Everyday Life: Beyond the Formal Ritual," by T. Wachtel, 1999. Paper presented at the "Reshaping Australian Institutions Conference: Restorative Justice and Civil Society," The Australian National University, Canberra, February 16-18, 1999. Copyright 1999 by Ted Wachtel. The article can be retrieved at <http://www.iirp.org/library/anu.html>. Reprinted with permission.

control must work in combination with support, for they observed that only when teachers have a positive relationship with students are they able to execute a high level of control on behaviour.

Knowing a student and their background enables an educator to recognize and understand the needs of the student. The respondents said to resolve misbehaviour an existing relationship between the educator and the student is necessary, because through the relationships the educator knows the student's needs. In this way the educator can respond in the best interests of the student. As a result of a positive relationship, students respond reciprocally to the actions of the educator, knowing the educator's decision is being made for the interest of the student and their education. In addition, Wachtel adds that broken relationships and lost community impact students by resulting in an increase in punitive responses to behaviour. The need for a vision for educators of consistently aiming to work with students, teaching them through every situation, whether disciplinary or educational, goes far in creating a restorative culture in a school.

#### *The Discretionary Continuum in Discipline*

Participants recognized the complexity of the dynamic balancing act many educators sustain in utilizing their discretion, desiring to build positive relationships while maintaining the integrity and professionalism of an educator. Participants expressed that the student-educator relationship is a fragile relationship. They say a simple discretionary act such as a brash comment by an educator, failure to follow up following removing a student from class, failure to act upon a situation, or misusing discretionary power when applying policy can all work towards impairing the student-educator relationship.

In order to strengthen the student-educator relationship and to promote and uphold student best interests, educators must be deliberate in using their power to restore students as opposed to punishing them. One cannot assume that educators are deliberately punitive, but factors including emotions, previous interactions, policies, and school culture can contribute towards educators making decisions that do not seek to uphold and restore students. Furthermore, some responses to behaviour which are traditionally seen as punitive may serve the best interest of the student. For example, restorative processes do not eliminate strategies such as suspensions, provided that the suspension is chosen by the community (including the offending student) to be appropriate for meeting the student's needs. Most essential to this process is the intentional decision of educators to always act with restoration of the student in mind.

On the “*Continuum of Vision for Educator Discretion in Promoting Best Interests Through Discipline*,” the use of punishment is depicted as an exploitation of discretion whereby an educator exercises discretion in a way that fails to uphold a student's interests; another interest impacts the decision (See Figure 4). Ultimately our schools are for serving the adolescents of our society. With this in mind, educators should always be working to move their discretion as far to the right on the continuum as possible. When educators work under the umbrella of restoration, then discretion is justified, for an educator's choice is public, defensible, and based on serving students' needs. As one moves to the right on the continuum, high school students' interests are promoted in the following five ways:

First, educators need to be sure that their choices are based on a restorative *vision* for students, rather than *reacting in the moment* and being swayed by the hundreds of



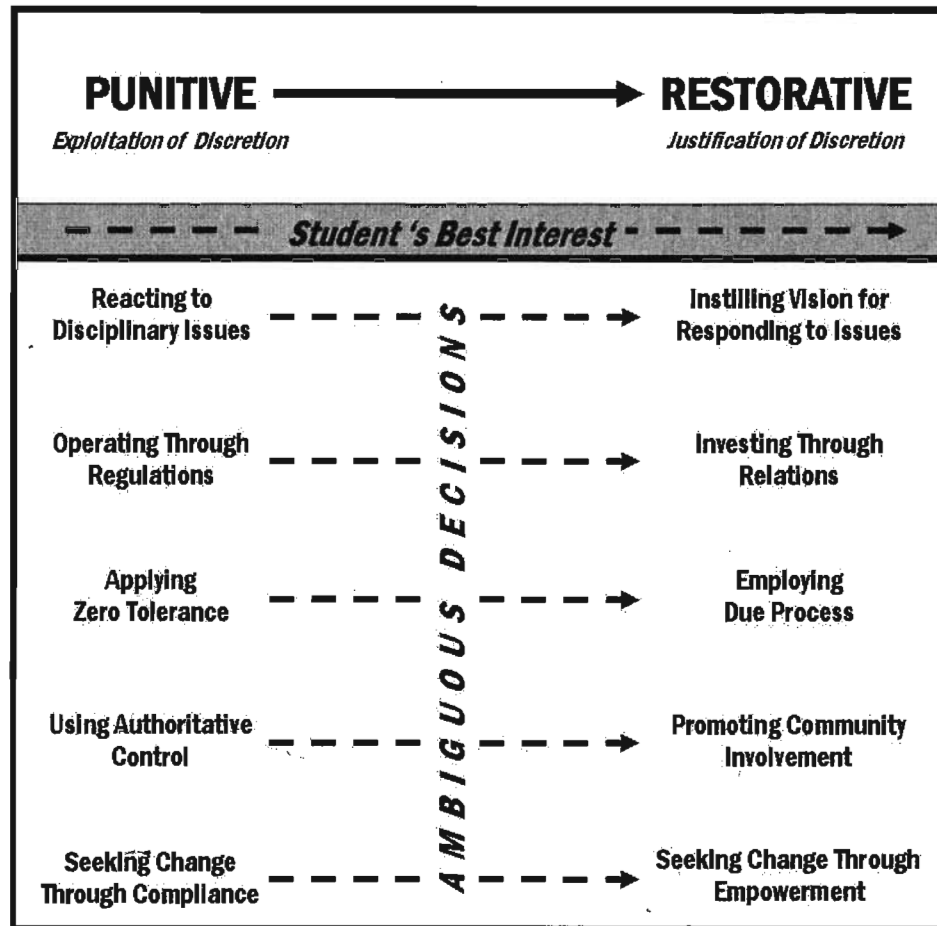


Figure 4. Continuum of vision for educators' discretion in promoting students' best interests through discipline.

factors which can dictate decisions. Participants stated that teachers who take their time in disciplinary situations ultimately make more just decisions, for they are not caught up in their emotions when they address the student.

When an educator works with the focus of *relationships* rather than with a focus of *rules*, then students will benefit. Each of the respondents interviewed recognized when educators cared about them. Policies are necessary in schools, but the development and application of them must come out of relationships rather than purely focusing on the black and white legalism of the policy.

Rather than watching educators rely on blanket punishments and *zero tolerance* policies for addressing situations, participants said they are always seeking *due process* in disciplinary situations. They held that when teachers address situations aiming to gain facts rather than to accuse students, then students will be accepting of the process and the final decision, for students will know that they were given a voice, regardless of whether or not the student feels that the decision was in his/her favour.

*Authoritative* control centralizes discretionary power, whereas *community* involvement empowers each stakeholder to utilize his discretion in upholding those involved in the conflict. Involving stakeholders not only empowers them to be involved in a given discretionary decision but also enables them to experience the outcome of a restorative process, thereby enhancing the possibility of each of the stakeholders using the process in the future. Each of the participants expressed how centralized power results in students giving up, whereas community power has the opposite effect, encouraging students to be involved in the process.

Finally, restorative processes encourage students to *become decision makers* and responders, for they observe that their decisions lead to upholding their interests. Likewise, punitive measures force students to *comply* with authoritative demands. In this case, students are left with no power and no vision and are taught that justice is served through partaking in punitive actions for the sake of preventing further punishment.

Down the middle of the continuum are “ambiguous decisions.” A response that teachers commonly use for avoiding the implementation of restorative practices is “I already do these things (the right side of the continuum) in my classroom!” This may be the case, but the teacher likely also employs approaches from the left side of the continuum. In the bible in the book of James 3:10-11 (New International Version), the author says “Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. Brothers, this should not be. Can fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?” When teachers use both the left side and the right side of the continuum, they present themselves as ambiguous in their decision making, for being both punitive and restorative is inconsistent. The teacher who praises a student one day and then shouts the next day at the student gives the student a mixed signal. It is no wonder that students see the student-educator relationship as fragile if they experience educators who live in the centre of the continuum. Educators need to ensure that they educate on the right side of the continuum, being deliberate to restore students in every interaction. Through this leadership, educators can mould students into becoming leaders themselves, developing students who become self-reliant in solving issues restoratively and teaching them how they can use their discretionary power appropriately.

### **Student Discretion**

The participants communicated that students possess significant discretionary power as well. Just as with educators, their discretionary power can be used to promote or inhibit students' best interests. The respondents were very clear that they respond to the expectations and limitations established by educators. Therefore educators must ask, "With what vision are expectations established?" If expectations act as limitations, established to act upon students for the purpose of regulating student response and maintaining order, then students say they will rebel. Participants said that rebellion takes many forms including disobeying policy, lying, and diverting blame. Furthermore, students will put educators in situations where they must make a difficult discretionary decision, forcing the educator to make a difficult decision that can strain the student-educator relationship. For example, a student who is late to class may say they were supporting a friend during a crisis. The educator now must decide whether further action is necessary for being late and decide whether the rationale for being late is genuine. Participants recognized the use of this discretionary power to be an abuse of the student-educator relationship, yet they felt it was justified when they were treated unjustly.

On the contrary, the participants said that they do not misuse their discretionary power to abuse the student-educator relationship when they have been repeatedly trusted and cared for by an educator. They value a strong student-educator relationship. Amstutz and Mullet (2005) articulate this same point, noting that educators need to recognize the students in a school community for the value and worth they hold as human beings. They add that educators must help students to identify their emotions in order to begin the process of empowering students to become initiators of conflict resolution.

Amstutz and Mullet believe it is natural for humans—specifically students—to recognize emotions in others but not in themselves. Through identifying personal emotions, students can learn to manage them appropriately. Once students learn to identify and manage their own emotions, then they will begin to empathize with others, for “we learn empathy as we are asked to find it in ourselves” (Amstutz and Mullet, p. 41).

Amstutz and Mullet (2005) believe that students who are cared for take risks, for the environment in which they operate is safe. Through this safety, a culture is established whereby students will utilize their voice, because the power is balanced between the educator and the student. Establishing a vision for discipline that aims to establish a school culture where both educators and students can utilize discretionary power to serve the best interests of the school community enables *discipline* to work as the meaning of the word intends: “to teach” our students to develop not only a restorative school, but a restorative society, upholding the value and interests of all.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (cited in Amstutz and Mullet, 2005, p. 3) said that the “secret of education lies in *respecting* the student.” Respect was the most common theme uttered by the participants throughout the interview process. They identified respect as the quality which needs to drive discretionary decisions. Yet respect can not be mandated or driven by policy. The respondents maintained that respect is earned and that every interaction an educator has with a student has the potential for increasing or harming the level of respect that exists in the student-educator relationship. From a student’s point of view, his/her best interests are upheld when he/she is respected. Amstutz and Mullet say that through respect, educators can develop accountability in students whereby they are empathetic towards their peers and are motivated to seek and

repair harm in broken situations. This is possible only through a collaborative and community-owned process.

As professionals in schools and leaders of students, educators have the responsibility of initiating, creating, and ensuring a system of restoration that empowers students, gives them a voice, and enhances their responsibility in preventing and resolving conflict. Amstutz and Mullet (2005) are adamant that students must become responsible for their own behaviour, for when individuals are regulated by others they feel no need to control themselves.

Embarking on a vision that utilizes the voices of students for upholding their interests means that we can work towards fulfilling our educational goals. Schools should not only seek complete retention of all students but also enhance the education they receive in terms of both curriculum and social awareness. Both knowledge and social skills are something that students should take from our schools and utilize for the rest of their lives. Restorative practices potentially enable discretionary power to give hope to our students rather than taking it away. It is through this hope that we send our students beyond our schools, not only so they can work within society but so they are equipped to uphold justice wherever they may go.

### **Implications for Theory**

Discretion is generally an undeveloped topic. This research adds to literature that speaks to discretion, specifically in an educational context. The study illuminates the areas in which educators employ their discretionary power. The study also establishes a base for further investigating the discretionary power of students, specifically in relation to disciplinary proceedings.

Throughout the 2 years over which I have undertaken this study, I have observed a shift towards utilizing restorative practices in educational settings. Though this shift was unforeseen by myself, it has been valuable as I have undertaken research. Several school districts across Ontario including the Kawartha Pines School District and the Waterloo School District in Ontario have initiated implementing restorative practices in schools. Other districts are actively seeking to initiate programs through the government's *Progressive Discipline* initiative. This research contributes to the theory and rationale for this province-wide shift.

Through the course of this study, I have come to recognize the value of my experience as a youth worker. Through my training and my on-the-job experience as a youth worker, I learned to relate to high school students. Understanding the culture of adolescents is invaluable to a teacher. My experience enabled me to become a vice-principal in my second year of teaching. Nevertheless, my teacher education was mostly void of discussion that related to relating to high school students. Educator theory and training that goes beyond curriculum, methods, assessment, and evaluation and tackles the issue of relating to students can promote the interests of both educators and students, potentially easing the tension that exists in a classroom environment. Furthermore, the ability to relate is integral in establishing a culture of restorative practice in a school. As professionals, educators must consistently reeducate themselves about adolescent culture. The study of secondary education programs that focus on relating to high school students and how this translates to the classroom would be invaluable.

Assessing the effectiveness of new restorative programs in schools will be difficult, for it is difficult to quantify behaviour changes. As a result, a long-term

qualitative study of schools and their students in these districts, relying on both educators and students for data, would be invaluable in the future for evaluating the effectiveness of the progressive discipline vision.

There is little research on the implementation of restorative practices in schools. Moreover, there are even fewer instances of top-down approaches to implementation of restorative practices. Examining not only effectiveness but modes of implementation would be useful for adding to existing theories.

### **Implications for Practice**

Restorative practices will be successful only if they are engrained in the entire school culture. Wachtel (1999b) says that we cannot expect to change school culture by merely employing an occasional restorative process during disciplinary proceedings. Successful implementation requires educating the changing existing structures and shifting the cultural paradigm. Educators must examine all aspects of their daily routines including curriculum, evaluation, pedagogy, supervision, and extracurricular activities from a restorative perspective, following up on the voices of the participants who encouraged educators to examine their policies and practices.

Educators in our schools need to teach students to relate to others. The shift towards restorative practices comes on the heels of a generational shift from a verbal society to a textual society. Verbal communication is significantly augmented by other forms of communication: text messages, e-mail, and social networking sites. I have been privileged through this research to sit down one on one with high school students, and to converse uninterrupted for a one-hour period. In a school environment and a society, where students are facing a computer screen rather than a person, speaking for this long is



next to impossible. Yet, this study has shown that students have incredible insight as it relates to perceptions of discretion in discipline. Educators need to be intentional in creating an environment that encourages students to utilize their voice in sharing their opinion. The ability for students to share joys and concerns with peers and educators is invaluable for both students and educational institutions.

Finally, educators must be intentional about implementing a vision for disciplining students and then educating the school community both in and beyond the doors of the school. Wachtel (1999b) describes that restorative practices are often mistaken as permissive actions. There is a portion of the community that believes justice can be accomplished only through punitive means. Educating the community as to the purpose and benefits of a restorative model will go far in ensuring the model stays to become culture both in and out of the school.

### **It Was Worth It!**

Too often I have heard students say that their thesis sits on a shelf collecting dust. I am excited that this is not the case for me. Students, discipline, and restoration continue to be a daily part of my life. For the past year, I have worked with a number of staff members at my school, seeking to implement a restorative system in our organization. The literature review I did for this thesis continues to be relevant as my colleagues and I have worked together to uphold student needs through a restorative model. The theory and practices I have learned through this research influence how I teach and how I parent. I trust that my students and my children will benefit because of it. It is my hope that I will never shelve this work. It was all worth it!

## References

- Adams, A. T. (2000). The status of school discipline and violence. *The Annals of the American Academy*, 567, 140-156.
- Aguilar, J. L. (1981) Insider research: An ethnography of a debate. In D.A. Messerschmidt (Ed.), *Anthropologists at home in North America: Methods and issues in one's own society* (pp. 15-26). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Amstutz, L. S., & Mullet, J. H. (2005). *The little book of restorative discipline for schools*. Intercourse, PA.: Goodbooks
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., & Razavieh, A. (2002). *Introduction to research education* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Toronto, ON: Nelson Thompson Learning.
- Asselin, A. E. (2003). Insider research: Issues to consider when doing qualitative research in your own setting [Electronic version]. *Journal for Nurses in Staff Development*, 19(2), 99-103.
- Baumgartner, M. P. (1992). The myth of discretion. In K. Hawkins (Ed.), *The uses of discretion* (pp.129-162). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bell, J. (1992). Discretionary decision-making: A jurisprudential view. In K. Hawkins (Ed.), *The uses of discretion* (pp. 89-111). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Belton, L. (1996). What our teachers should know and be able to do: A student's view. *Educational Leadership*, 54(1), 66-68.
- Beresford, J. (2000, September). *Student perspectives on school improvement*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference, Cardiff University.

- Caelli, K., Ray, L., & Mill, J. (2003). 'Clear as mud': Toward greater clarity in generic qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(2), Article 1. Retrieved November 9, 2007 from <http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/pdf/caellietal.pdf>
- Cameron, L., & Thorsborne, M. (1998). *Restorative justice and school discipline: Mutually exclusive? A practitioner's view of the impact of community conferencing in Queensland school*. Retrieved Nov. 30, 2006, from International Institute for Restorative Practices Website <http://www.iirp.org/library/schooldisc.html>
- Carson, S. (2004). Voices from the classroom: Know your student. *Research Room*. Retrieved April 6, 2007 from [http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/voices\\_from.html](http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/voices_from.html)
- Center for Justice and Reconciliation. (2005). *Restorative justice online*. Retrieved Nov. 30, 2006, from <http://www.restorativejustice.org/intro/>
- Charlton, T. (1996). 'Listening to pupils in the classrooms and schools. In D. Galloway, & R. Davie (Eds.), *Listening to children in education* (pp. 49-63). London: David Fulton.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Costenbader, V., & Markson, S. (1998). School suspension: A study with secondary school students. *Journal of School Psychology*, 36(1), 59-82.
- Creswell, J.W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dilley, P. (2004). Interviews and the philosophy of qualitative research. *Journal of Higher Education*, 75(1), 127-132.
- Duner, A., & Nordstrom, M. (2006). The discretion and power of street-level bureaucrats: An example from Swedish municipal eldercare. *European Journal of Social Work*, 9(4), 425-444.
- Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario. (2007). *Safe schools legislation – Bill 212*. Retrieved July 23, 2008 from <http://www.etfo.ca/ISSUESINEDUCATION/SAFESCHOOLS/Pages/default.aspx>
- Essex, N. L. (2002) Ten costly mistakes in disciplining disruptive students. *Education and the Law*, 14(3), 167-172.
- Everett, S., & Price, H. P. (1995). Students' perceptions of violence in public schools: The MetLife survey. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 17, 345-352.
- Feldman, M. S. (1992). Social limits to discretion: An organizational perspective. In K. Hawkins (Ed.), *The uses of discretion* (pp. 163-183). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Follett, M. P. (1970). The teacher-student relation [Electronic Version]. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 15(1), 137-148. (Original speech delivered in 1928)
- Galloway, D. (1996). Setting the scene. In D. Galloway, & R. Davie (Eds.), *Listening to children in education* (pp. 1-14). London: David Fulton.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, F. (1999). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research* (Rev. ed.). Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

- Haft, W (2000). More than zero: The cost of zero tolerance and the case for restorative justice in schools. *Denver University Law Review*, 77, 1-14.
- Handler, J. (1992). Discretion: Power, quiescence, and trust. In K. Hawkins (Ed.), *The uses of discretion* (pp. 331-360). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hawkins, K. (1992). The use of legal discretion: Perspectives from law and social science. In K. Hawkins (Ed.), *The uses of discretion* (pp. 11-46). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hudson, W. (2006). Relationships as the basis for discipline. *Today's Catholic Teacher*. Retrieved April 21, 2007 from <http://www.peterli.com/archive/tct/1210.shtm>
- Hughes, J. N., Cavell, T. A., & Jackson, T. (1999). Influence of the teacher-student relationship on childhood conduct problems: A prospective study. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 28(2), 173-184.
- Innes, M., Moss, T., & Smigiel, H. (2001). What do the children say? The importance of student voice. *Research in Drama Education*, 6(2), 207-221.
- Jaeger, D. R. M. (2005). *The use of discretionary authority: The Safe Schools Act, 2000 and the faculty of St. Roy's Catholic Secondary School*. Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education. Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario.
- Jamieson, D. W., & Thomas, K. W. (1974). Power and conflict in the student-teacher relationship. *Journal of Applied Behaviour Science*, 10, 321-336.

- Jones, T. S. (2006). Combining conflict resolution education and human rights education: Thoughts for school-based peace education. *Journal of Peace Education, 3*(2), 187-208.
- Kanuha, V. K. (2000). "Being" native versus "going native": Conducting social work research as an insider [Electronic Version]. *Social Work, 45*(5), 439-447.
- Kohn, A. (1996). *Beyond discipline*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum development.
- Komisar, B. P., & Coombs, J. R. (1964). The concept of equality in education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 3*(3), 223-244.
- Lewis, R. (2001). Classroom discipline and student responsibility: The students' view. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*, 301-319.
- Lincoln, Y. S. (1995). In search of students' voices. *Theory Into Practice, 34*(2), 88-93.
- Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Manley-Casimir, M. E. (1974). *School governance as discretionary justice*. *School Review, 82*(2), 347-362.
- Manley-Casimir, M. E. (1977, May). *School governance as discretionary action*. Paper presented at an invitational conference on Law & Education, University of Saskatchewan.
- Manley-Casimir, M. E. (1978). A case study approach to discretion in school discipline. *Interchange, 8*(1, 2), 84-100.

- Manley-Casimir, M. E. (1999, September). *The Tim Horton effect in educational administration*. Presentation for the 1999 Annual Graduate Conference, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON.
- Manning, P. K. (1992). 'Big bang' decisions: Notes on a naturalistic approach. In K. Hawkins (Ed.), *The uses of discretion* (pp. 249-286). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond, V. P. (1982). *Power in the classroom I: Teacher and student perceptions*. Paper presented at the Eastern Communication Association Convention, Hartford, CT.
- Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2005). *The Ontario safe schools act. Executive Summary*. Retrieved April 15, 2007 from [http://ohrc.on.ca/english/consultations/safe-schools\\_1.shtml#\\_Toc73784848](http://ohrc.on.ca/english/consultations/safe-schools_1.shtml#_Toc73784848)
- Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2007). *The Ontario safe schools act: School discipline and discrimination. Executive Summary*. Retrieved August 20, 2007 from [http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/discussion\\_consultation/SafeSchoolsConsultRepENG](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/discussion_consultation/SafeSchoolsConsultRepENG)
- Pomeroy, E. (1999). The teacher-student relationship in secondary school: Insights from excluded students. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20(4), 465-482.
- Shreeve, A., Boddington, D., Bernard, B., Brown, K., Clarke, K., Dean, L., et al. (2002). Student perceptions of rewards and sanctions. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 10(2), 239-256.
- Smith, B. J. (2000). Marginalized youth, delinquency, and education: The need for critical interpretive research. *The Urban Review*, 32(3), 293-312.

- Sossin, L. (1993). The politics of discretion. *Canadian Public Administration*, 36(3), 364-391.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stefkovich, J. A., & O'Brien, G.M. (2004). Best interests of the student: An ethical model. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 42(2), 197-214.
- Sughrue, J. A. (2003). Zero tolerance for children: Two wrongs do not make a right. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39, 238-258.
- Thorson, S. (1996). The missing link: Students discuss school discipline. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 29(3), 1-21.
- Torres, M. S., Jr., & Chen, Y. (2006). Assessing Columbine's impact on students' fourth amendment case outcomes: Implications for administrative discretion and decision making. *NAASP Bulletin*, 90(3), 185-206.
- VanHecke, J. R., & Buckingham, D. E. (1993) *In the spirit of community: Student centred discipline*. Paper presented at the conference of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Boston, March 23, 1993.
- Vavrus, F., & Cole, K. (2002). "I didn't do nothin'": The discursive construction of school suspension. *The Urban Review*, 34(2), 87-111.
- Wachtel, T. (1999a, February). *Restorative justice in everyday life: Beyond the formal ritual*. Paper presented at the Reshaping Australian Institutions Conference: Restorative Justice and Civil Society, Australian National University, Canberra. Retrieved October 21, 2008 from <http://www.iirp.org/library/anu.html>.



- Wachtel, T. (1999b, February). *SaferSanerSchools: Restoring community in a disconnected world*. Adaptation of a paper presented at the “Reshaping Australian Institutions Conference: Restorative Justice and Civil Society.” The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Wald, J., & Kurlaender, M. (2003). Connected in Seattle? An exploratory study of student perceptions of discipline and attachment to teachers. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 99, 35-54.
- Warner, L. L. (1975). *Relationships between student participation in decision making on discipline and the perceptions of students and teachers on selected aspects of school life: A case study of Ontario Secondary schools*. Thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of Toronto (OISE) – Department of Educational Theory.
- Yin, R. (2003a) *Applications of case study research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Yin, R. (2003b) *Case study research: Design and methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Zehr, H. (2002). *The little book of restorative justice*. Intercourse, PA.: GoodBooks.
- Zehr, H. (2005). *Changing lenses: A new focus for crime and justice*. Scotsdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Zeni, J. (Ed.). (2001a). *Ethical issues in practitioner research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Zeni, J. (2001b). The IRB, the HSR – and the ethics of insider research. *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*, 4(1), 1-17. Retrieved November 18, 2005 from [http://education.ucsc.edu/faculty/gwells/networks/journal/Vol%204\(1\).2001](http://education.ucsc.edu/faculty/gwells/networks/journal/Vol%204(1).2001)

## Appendix A

## Notification of Ethics Clearance



**Brock  
University**

Office of Research Services

Research Ethics Office

St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1

T: 905-688-5550, Ext. 3035/4876 F: 905-688-0748

[www.brocku.ca](http://www.brocku.ca)

COPY

DATE: December 14, 2007

FROM: Michelle McGinn, Chair  
Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Michael Manley-Casimir, Education  
Michael MANLEY-CASIMIR  
Owen Webb

FILE: 07-112 MANLEY-CASIMIR

TITLE: Student Perceptions of Discretion in Discipline

*Michelle K. McGinn*

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

**DECISION: Accepted as clarified**

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of December 14, 2007 to August 31, 2007 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. *The study may now proceed.*

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form *Continuing Review/Final Report* is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

MM/pb

## Appendix B

### Sample List of Interview Questions

- A. *Examine discretionary factors employed by teachers and administrators in disciplinary proceedings:***
1. Can you tell me how discipline has impacted you since you've been at this school?
  2. What do you think about the effectiveness of the discipline policies at this school?
  3. Describe some strategies that students use to avoid being disciplined.
  4. Can you describe a disciplinary situation where you thought students were treated fairly?
- B. *Examine how students' best interests can be promoted and upheld through disciplinary procedures:***
5. How would you define "effective discipline"?
  6. How can discipline be more effective at this school?
  7. Do you feel that students are listened to, and their input valued, when they are being disciplined?
  8. How might a teacher or an administrator be hindered from disciplining in a student's best interest?
- C. *Investigate the impact of the student-educator relationship on discretion used by educators in disciplinary actions***
9. Describe a teacher whom you view as an effective disciplinarian
  10. Describe a time that you were disciplined effectively by a teacher or administrator.
  11. How does the effectiveness of discipline differ from class to class? (How does it differ in other parts of the school?)

## Appendix C

### Example of Initial Coding

#### Interview

Interviewer: What's the value of having the teacher and the student in the same room at the same time?

Participant: The value?

Interviewer: As opposed to the VP going to the teacher and then going to student.

Participant: It gets everything done quicker - and being able to say it to each other's face. I mean, you are coming clean about it right away. If things are dealt with correctly, there won't be that grudge - there won't be talking behind the teacher's back if you guys are both good about it. Like if you agree with each other and you've explained yourself.

#### Initial Coding

- *Creating* a more efficient process (though educators may think contrary to this)
- *Telling* truthful stories, for both parties are present
- *Avoiding* grudges
- *Upholding* justice-
- *Developing* a positive "hallway culture"
- *Requiring* effort from both parties
- *Opportunity* for both parties to agree

#### Focused Coding

The Initial Coding contributed towards placing these data under the heading of *Effective Processes*.